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Is There a Cure for Anti-Semitism?

A SYMPOSIUM:

Saul Bellow, Stanley Crouch, Eugene Genovese,
John Gross, Cynthia Ozick, Martin Peretz,
Norman Podhoretz, James Sleeper, Robert Wistrich

WILLIAM PHILLIPS Clement Greenberg

STANLEY CROUCH Ralph Waldo Ellison

EDITH KURZWEIL On the NEA

CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN American Identities

MARK KURLANSKY Saving Haiti

JAMES INGO FREED The Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Editor's Note: With our spring issue, we introduced cultural cartoons as a new feature and invite original submissions for consideration in this category.

COMMENT

Clem Clement Greenberg was a prominent member of the first generation of the New York intellectuals. With his death last May, its ranks are thinning, and there are very few of us left.

I first met Clem in the late thirties at the beginning of the new *Partisan Review*. Our relationship went up and down – whose doesn't? But most of the time we were close friends. Later on, Clem became known as pugnacious, strong-minded, and somewhat dogmatic. But then he was a fledgling writer. However, he already showed signs of conviction and self-confidence. Unlike most of us, he was not a big talker. In fact, he spoke slowly and a bit hesitatingly. He was low-keyed, and he did not bluster or boast or hide behind a heavy rhetoric. He was direct and outspoken, and if he had any influence beyond his art and cultural criticism, it was in the direction of intellectual honesty.

A little-known aspect of his life was that although he was polite in intellectual exchange, he was a street fighter in everyday life. One incident I remember: we were on the pier of the Staten Island ferry when two pimply sailors approached us, and one made an anti-Semitic remark. Before I knew it, Clem had knocked him down, and I managed to grab the other one and throw him to the floor to keep him from interfering. Like typical intellectuals, we went on talking as though nothing had happened.

Clem's first major piece, which appeared in *Partisan Review*, was the famous essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." It earned him the early reputation of being for high and serious art. In fact, only a few years later he and I were put down by Russell Lyons in *Harper's Magazine* as high-brows and elitists – which, I suppose, was a preview of more recent trendy attitudes.

It was shortly afterward that Clem wrote his first art pieces for *Partisan Review*. But even in the beginning, he showed an unusual grasp of the problems involved in writing about art. Criticism about the non-verbal arts, such as painting and music, is a difficult enterprise, but Clem devised a method of transcending these limitations. He became, as we know, a great art critic, probably the greatest American art critic of our century. His accomplishment was not only to become the leading spokesman of the new art movement that would be known as Abstract Expressionism but also to forge a critical vocabulary for the new painters and sculptors and for art in general. He has been called a formalist, and it is true that he focused on the formal qualities of paintings and sculptures,

but it has been forgotten that he was also, in fact, criticized for saying that the Abstract Expressionists represented the next advance in the history and tradition of art.

In later years, and more and more frequently, Clement Greenberg has been accused of being dogmatic. It is true that he was somewhat dogmatic or, at least, assertive. But it also has been forgotten that he had to fight against the very large opposition to the new art. Not only were most people, including critics and intellectuals, entrenched in the resistance to the abstract expressionists, but even some of my colleagues on *Partisan Review* scoffed at the new movement and at Clem's advocacy of it. (I, myself, learned to see Jackson Pollock's work because Clem showed me how to look at it.) For different reasons, Philip Rahv, James Johnson Sweeney, and George L. K. Morris were opposed to Clem's writing, and I had to insist to get Clem printed. There is, for example, the amusing story of Rahv once saying to Harold Rosenberg that Rothko was just a house painter. Rosenberg, who was never at a loss for a clever remark, said to Rahv, "Don't you think it is interesting that a house painter painted these pictures?"

In such an atmosphere, it is understandable that Clem's observations were considered too avant-garde, too far out, and on the dogmatic side. And one is reminded of Matthew Arnold's reply to the charge that he was dogmatic. "Sure," Arnold said, "but I am right." And so was Clem. We will miss him.

French Stalinists There are those who know that French intellectuals after the war were in a Stalinist trance. But Tony Judt's recent book, *Past Imperfect*, creates an even more dismal picture by supplying facts that some experts and natives didn't know. To be sure, some of this is old news, and, presumably, not so pertinent today as it was before the demise of Communism in the former Soviet Union and in the Eastern European countries formerly under Russian domination. But the political lessons are still useful, especially since the academy, for instance, is rife with ultra-radical movements, such as neo-Marxism for one, that echo some of the modes of thinking which nourished the apologists for Stalin.

The main French intellectuals Judt cites are Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Mounier, Domenach, and Bourdet, and the extent of their support of Stalinism is staggering. Perhaps the most shocking betrayal was that of Julian Benda, the author of the famous *Treason of the*

Intellectuals, who in the fifties reversed his earlier pure stand and said that it was necessary to follow the Stalinists in the fight against fascism. I was in Paris for a few months during that period, and while I was part of a small, besieged community that included Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, Mânes Sperber, Saul Bellow, Czeslaw Milosz, H. J. Kaplan, Mary McCarthy, and Robert Rousset, I actually was not aware of many of the worst grovelling statements made by French intellectuals.

The rationalizations, deceptions, falsifications, and lies ranged over a wide area of debased apologetics. The list includes almost every variety of intellectual abdication. Among the modes of argument used by Sartre and the other French Stalinists were: the apotheosis of history, of which the Communists were of course the embodiment; the virtues of violence and revolution; the sacred mission of the workers; the presumed lack of viable political alternatives; the contempt for the bourgeoisie; the heritage of the French Revolution; the dismissal of liberalism; the admiration of Stalin's power; the belief that despite the faults of the Communists and the Soviet regime, they were the only viable carriers of human liberation; and of course the justification of the means by false ends. Judt also points out the lack of confidence in themselves, and indeed, the self-laceration of the French intellectuals, and the double standards they applied to the Soviet Union and to the Western democracies.

Judt says that the Soviet apologists did not include all the educated classes and the intelligentsia as a whole, only the most famous and articulate. However, I must say that my impression during my stay in Paris was that I was in a Moscow suburb. Perhaps this impression was created to some extent by the fact that the Communists controlled the CGT, the largest French union of workers. However, it is clear that though the Stalinization of the intellectuals was much more extensive in France than in the United States, many of the same false arguments were used by the Stalinist supporters in this country. What was missing here was any corresponding take-over of intellectual life similar to that which had occurred in France, the strength of the tradition of the French Revolution, and of course French rhetoric. Lacking too in America was the same kind of control of the large labor unions, a point that Judt strangely does not play up.

Clearly, Judt's exhaustive analysis of the French intellectual situation in the fifties is of enormous historical interest. But its lessons are also pertinent today. For many of the current liberation movements employ arguments similar to those used by the French Stalinist intellectuals. As Trotsky once said of Stalin, they assume what they have to prove. They assume, for instance, that simply being on the left is by definition more moral, truer, more viable, and that, accordingly, anything on the conser-

vative side is automatically immoral and untrue.

One important question that Judt does not go into is the contradictory nature of Western intellectuals in Western history. For if the leading French intellectuals betrayed their calling, as many intellectuals have done in the past, what can we say about the general significance of intellectuals? Have they ever been independent thinkers, as defined, for example, by Arthur Koestler? Perhaps the contradictory role of the intellectuals is explained by their dual nature: that of priest and clown, wise man and fool. Thus they have always been the bearers of the ideas and values of our civilization, while they also have reflected the baser currents of their time. This would explain, perhaps, why anti-Semitism, racism, colonialism, and apologetics for slavery have existed at the highest levels of intellectual life. Thus the French intellectuals Judt describes were not only Stalinist stooges but at the same time at the top of their professions. Some people are able to judge the dismal political role they played. But who is to judge the judges in this continuous process in which intellectuals criticize the mistakes of their contemporaries and predecessors?

W. P.

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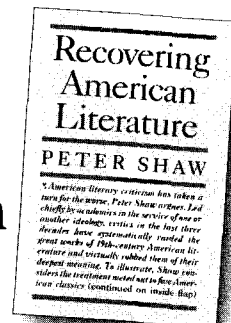
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STANLEY CROUCH

How Long? So Long

As I observed in a recently published eulogy, Ralph Ellison (1914–1994), alone of the world-famous Afro-American novelists, never denied his American identity, his American birthright, his complex responsibilities as a participant in the analyzing of American meaning, which is the job of the intellectual, and the remaking of American life in the hopefully immortal rhythms and tunes of art, which is the job of our aesthetically creative. Ellison had no interest in the overpaid chitlin circuit of professional alienation and guilt-mongering. He knew that all distant ethnic roots had been transmuted by the tragedy of American collision and the intricate cultural blues of collusion.

That is why Ellison floated above the petty darknesses of race and opportunism that have brought so many devitalized dissonances to the orchestra of our national life. He was listening to a music more celestial and more in touch with the earth of our culture, the score written in the sky and in the mud, where the tales of heartbreak and hope, courage and cowardice, ambivalence and absolute accuracy tell us of the cosmopolitan bloodlines that make us Americans – part Yankee, part Indian, part pioneer, part Negro, part Christian, part Jewish, part Hispanic, part Asian.

Ellison understood what Sergio Leone, the Italian filmmaker, meant when he said that American cinema was an international language because it had spoken across so many barriers within its own culture that it touched everyone in the world. That is what our brown-skinned writer from Oklahoma sought in his work. Those specific, those complex, those delicate, those dancing, those wounded, those ribald, those elevated, and those down-home rhythms and tunes of the U.S.A. were what he always sought to bring to the page, allowing for liberation into the vast drama of human life that knows no limits beyond those inherent in the individual. Yes, he floated above the childish squabbles of the ethnic barnyard in search of the epic voice of the American experience, which speaks both to the ages and to the enjoyments and anxieties of the moment. Now truly an Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison is one we will miss until we join him, but we were damn lucky to ever have had such a great spirit, mind, and heart among us.

Is There a Cure for Anti-Semitism?

Rabbi David Woznicka: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It is my privilege to welcome you to the 92nd Street Y, to the last of this year's evening events.

I want to thank *Partisan Review* for cosponsoring these discussions, and for providing our moderators, both Mr. William Phillips and Dr. Edith Kurzweil, Editor and Executive Editor, respectively, of *Partisan Review*. And I want to thank them for being here and for helping to arrange this evening. Tomorrow morning, as many of you know, there is a continuation of this discussion. With that, I shall step aside and ask you to join me in welcoming this evening's panelists.

William Phillips: Welcome to a hot subject on a cool evening. The speakers are all pretty well known to you, but I'll remind you of some facts about them. The first speaker will be Saul Bellow, University Professor and Professor of English at Boston University. He is a Nobel laureate in Literature, and the author of many great novels which I am sure most of you have read. He is, if I may venture an opinion at this point, probably the best American writer. He is also the recipient of many other awards, including a Pulitzer Prize.

The second speaker will be John Gross, who is a theater critic of the London *Sunday Telegraph* and a frequent contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement* and other publications. He is the author of *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, and his newest book, which bears, of course, on this subject, is called *Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy*.

The third speaker will be Cynthia Ozick, whose highly praised novels include *Cannibal Galaxy*, *The Messiah of Stockholm*, *The Shawl*, and *Trust*. I thought you would want to know, too, that she has written a play about the denial of the Holocaust, called *Blue Light*. It will be directed by Sidney Lumet and will star Diane Wiest, opening this summer, August 10th, at the Bay Street Theater in Sag Harbor, New York, so you must all go and see the play.

Saul Bellow: "A Jewish Writer." A word about the title of this talk: It deals with an aspect of my personal history and the substantiality of the

Editor's Note: "Is There a Cure for Anti-Semitism?" was first presented as "Writers and Editors Discuss Anti-Semitism," a symposium held on May 5th and 6th, 1994, in New York City, with the cooperation of the 92nd Street Y-YMHA.

person behind that history. The notion of a substantial person has been subjected by some modern thinkers to tests which bring to mind the crash dummies used by engineers in simulated collisions or airline disasters in which the dummies are consumed by flaming aviation fuel. All I have to say, speaking as a novelist, is that some of these thinkers have raised questions which perhaps do not need to be raised. And that they wrote books I now regret having read.

I will ask you, for the present, to believe that I am right and that my life is not based on inauthentic premises and ideological delusions. There are so many people, you see, who don't really know what they're talking about. And one has to listen to them. It is thought to be only fair.

The philosopher Morris R. Cohen was once asked by a student, "Professor, how do I know that I exist?"

"So?" the professor replied, "And who is asking?"

A question can come only from a questioner. But Cohen's Jewish answer goes far beyond epistemology and refers his student to an even more radical mystery, that of his own substantiality. This anecdote covers me. I can continue to do what I have done all my life; that is, to turn instinctively toward my first consciousness. This first consciousness has always seemed easily accessible and most real. For persons who have no access to any such core consciousness, there are no mysteries; and where mystery is lacking, being itself wavers uneasily. But our modern, educated, "advanced" thought throws doubt on my first consciousness, which has a long unbroken history. I wouldn't know how to prove its reality or justify its sincerity or its authenticity. All I can say is that it is a durable fact, it has lasted a lifetime, and I cannot see why anyone should feel it necessary to put its reality in doubt.

So, in my first consciousness I am, among other things, a Jew, the child of Jewish immigrants. At home our parents spoke Russian to each other. The children spoke Yiddish to the parents, English amongst themselves. At the age of four we were set to study the Old Testament in Hebrew. We observed Jewish customs, reciting prayers and blessings all day long. Because we read Genesis again and again, my first consciousness was that of a cosmos, and in that cosmos I was a Jew. I suppose it would now seem proper to apply the word "archaic" to such a representation of the world – archaic, prehistoric – but this was my given, and it would be idle to quarrel with it. A millennial belief in a Holy God may have the effect of deepening the soul, but it is also obviously archaic, and modern influences would presently bring me up to date and reveal how antiquated such a conception of my origins was. To turn away from such origins has, however, always seemed utterly impossible. It would be a treason to my first consciousness to "un-Jew" myself. One

may be tempted to go behind the given and invent something better, to find a more advantageous arrangement. In America that is common, and we have all seen it done, and done with great ingenuity. But the thought of such an attempt never entered my mind. Thus I may have been archaic, but I escaped the horrors of an identity crisis.

Sixty-odd years ago, as a high school student reading Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, I learned that ours was a Faustian civilization, and that we, the Jews, were not Faustians but Magians, the survivors and representatives of an earlier historical type, one incapable of apprehending the Faustian spirit that had invented the great civilizations of the West; aliens whose adaptive mimicries were supplied by a will to survive and rested on stratagems and deceptions. Thus Disraeli, one of the greatest statesmen of his century, was seen by Spengler as a man who couldn't have known what he was doing, a Magian throwback who couldn't possibly enter into the English or European Faustian spirit. Reading this, I was deeply wounded. I was educating myself for a civilization in which, if I was to believe Spengler, I could never hope to thrive. Spengler was highly esteemed in Chicago. The insurance agent who called every week to collect a quarter from my mother, carrying a fat, many-pocketed leather file fastened with leather bands, was a devoted Spenglerian and maddeningly serious. So we had a clumsy discussion in which I withheld the information that I was a Magian. Later I discerned a kind of Darwinism in Spengler's outlook – mankind advancing by evolutionary stages. In the Spenglerian museum I was among the Ammonites or the Pterodactyls.

I was familiar with street anti-Semitism (Jew-hatred, in plain words), but I had not expected this from a high-powered intellectual like Spengler, whose pockets were full of civilizations, ancient and modern. And in the end, I got out of the whole thing – the prospect of being stalled forever on an historical siding – by reasoning that none of this applied to the U.S.A. Everything was different over here. Our enlightened liberal order was a new venture in civilization, leaving all societies in the rear, so that what Magians were to Faustians, Faustians might well be to Americans. Our skyscrapers were not at all like their Gothic cathedrals. As for high culture, I was too young to have developed such ambitious or heroic ideas about it.

The condition I am looking into here is that of a young Jewish American who in the late thirties finds that he is something like a writer and begins to consider how to combine these three ingredients. Not everyone agrees that this is feasible.

Remember that in those remote times one still spoke about Brahmins and the Genteel Tradition. Below the Mason-Dixon line in-

tellectuals saw in the Jews emblems of corruption, insidious and demonic manifestations of big capital and allies of Yankee industrialism. "The rats are underneath the piles, the Jew is underneath the lot," T. S. Eliot wrote. Immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were suspected of upsetting the political and social equilibrium of the country. Italians who gladdened the hearts of American tourists in Florence and Naples provoked disgust in Boston and Philadelphia. Immigrant labor enriched the country and raised the value of its real estate, but the Jews were identified only with cupidity and squalor. Those who had come in the 1840s from Germany were polite and assimilable, although a Robert Moses, while at Yale, rich, gifted, and good-looking as he was, still did not make Skull and Bones or any lesser club. But the Russian and Polish Jews, whose cackling and shrieking set Henry James's teeth on edge when he resided in the East Side, were bizarre to a dangerous degree.

Seventy years after James had published *The American Scene*, John Updike, reviewing one of my books in *The New Yorker*, declared that he saw a parallel between James's East Side horror and my recoil from the Negro underclass and the conditions of life in the housing projects of Chicago. A suggestion rich in possibilities. My view was that if well-born WASPs wished to put me down as a Jewish poacher on their hereditary cultural prosperity, let them show that they were indeed proper heirs, qualified by talent.

I was very probably being deliberately dense and brash, for I couldn't have been so simple-minded as to believe that I really had met certain persistent objections. These were repeatedly thrust upon me not only by WASPy snobs and irritable rivals but also by certain Jewish writers and thinkers whom I held in esteem. Of these the most memorable was Agnon. Back in the fifties I visited Shmuel Agnon in Jerusalem, and as we sat drinking tea, chatting in Yiddish, he asked whether my books had been translated into Hebrew. When I said they hadn't been, he drew back in his chair and said he was alarmed to hear it. "The languages of the Diaspora will not last," he warned me, with concern, with charm, with slyness. He gave me to understand that eternity was looming over me and that I would be wiped out unless I moved quickly. To feed Agnon's wit and keep up the pitch of the conversation, I said, "Poor Heinrich Heine. What's to become of him?" "Oh, there's no worry about Heine. He's been translated beautifully," Agnon said. "He's perfectly safe."

Was Hebrew the *only* language for a Jew? Out of respect for my elders I was silent. Or rather I kept my own counsel silently – that, too, went back to childhood. Was the old guy suggesting that I dismantle my life and start again from scratch? I was not about to run away from my

past. It was no trouble at all to imagine a more desirable one, less ragged, haphazard, hybrid. There was no end to the better alternatives, but not a single of them was for me. The only truly interesting life was the one I had lived; a mixed life, to say the least. Suppose that Agnon was inviting me to become a traditional Jew, like himself; he might as well advise me to go for assimilation. I was about as likely to turn into an Episcopalian with an invented WASP pedigree as to chronicle the stockyards of Chicago in the language of the Talmud.

I was aware that Agnon was directing my attention to certain chapters of Jewish history. How did I propose to deal with those? He was gently putting it to me. To write in English, French, Russian, or German was to assimilate; and assimilation in Germany had failed hideously.

I am tempted to send Agnon a letter in the *Herzog* style to say that I cannot imagine any circumstances in which it should be necessary here in America to repudiate my Jewishness. Among other things I might mention that the Weimar Republic was never much of a democracy, whereas Jews in America *could* rely on a legal equality guaranteed by a powerful Constitution. Government cannot come into the private sphere where Jew-hatred exists, as it exists in all more or less Christian countries, but it is unlikely that our liberal democracy will ever be overthrown to be succeeded by a regime founded on Jew-hatred. Hitler offered the German people very little else. The German people, however, accepted his offer.

Now I am a novelist, not a political theorist, and I am not on firm ground when I speculate amateurishly. But I do understand that Jews, when they look at Jewish history, can't avoid thinking along these lines. Valéry, the great French poet and critic, said somewhere that a great opportunity awaited some modern novelist, that of writing the *Divine Comedy* of intellectual life. I never got around to this, and at my age I never shall. But I have made mental sketches for an intellectual *Inferno*. It contains quite a group of characters. The *Paradiso*, by contrast, is relatively empty. Only a handful of thinkers make it. What I am hinting at, none too subtly, is that novelists cannot rely on intellectuals to take charge of the Jewish question for them.

I never felt that it would profit me to make too close a study of the outlook of German Jewry. Busy with novels, I have never been free for scholarship and the close reading of history, but I am aware of the view widely held in Germany and elsewhere that European Jews attached themselves to German, French, English, or Russian culture and that lacking a taproot, their achievements were unfortunately limited. This is certainly the argument made by Jung. As I understand him, the European Jews unluckily lacked the indispensable chthonic connection without

which there is no genuine art. I wonder whether such reckoning is not connected with nationalism and especially nineteenth-century romantic nationalism. Perhaps there was an echo of this in Agnon's opinion that I should have my books translated into Hebrew. Teasing was his Jewish way of being serious. What he was really saying was that the soul of the Jew must turn away from Europe and contemplate wisdom (*Hochma*) in the promised land. Yes, but can the Jews confine themselves to Israel? The Israelis are greatly attached to Western science and culture. After so many centuries abroad, they seem unable to be completely happy within their new and limited boundaries. I don't deny that it would have been agreeable to study wisdom at Agnon's feet. He said that if I had had enough Hebrew to understand him I would have longed to see him again. But he told me this in Yiddish (*volt nach mirgebnat ihr volt nach mir gebenkt*), and Yiddish is or was a European language.

Jews have written over the centuries in Greek, Latin, Arabic, Spanish, German, Russian – in Tamil, for all I know. If you were born in America, all essential communications, and your deepest communications with yourself as well, would of course be in American English. You will neither tell the truth nor lie in any other language. Without it, no basic reckonings are made. You will not reflect on death in Hebrew or French. Your language is the principal instrument of your humanity. When the doors of the gas chambers were shut, the German Jews – and, for that matter, the Polish Jews – called upon God in the language of their murderers, for they had no other. Your language is your spiritual base. Yes, I know the word “spiritual” is in disrepute, but what I am saying can, if you like, be framed more acceptably if you put it that existence is, finally, a mystery, a radical mystery graspable, if at all, by language.

Well, in our gorgeous, powerful, and confused country, this paragon of popular democracies and shaper of the future, there appear novelists, writers, or if you prefer, literary phenomenologists, of English, Irish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Scandinavian and Negro extraction. For what they do, these are not the best of times. We are witnessing a vast melt-down. There are more and more hybrids, fewer and fewer true-bred types (*metèques*). Some writers are still thinking of high culture and of past masterpieces; others feel that they should be satisfied with rough results. The odds against finding the elements of a new synthesis do not look encouraging. Yet it is possible now, in the middle of this melt-down, to have a thoroughly independent look at the human situation as it affects the Jews.

When I was young, cultural structures were still firm or looked firm to Jewish artists, who had to prepare to love these tightly held Christian

and national “properties” from afar. The Germans told us what was really cooking. We can ignore Wagner and his racist rages. But even the reasonable, fair-minded Goethe wrote, in *Wilhelm Meisters* Book III, “We do not tolerate any Jew among us, for how can we grant him a share in the highest culture, the origin and tradition of which he denies?” And here is Nietzsche, certainly no enemy to the Jews, who wrote: “I have not yet met a German who is favorably disposed toward the Jews.” He did not mean this as a compliment to the Germans. And then in 1953, Heidegger, considered by many to be the greatest philosopher of this century, spoke of “the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism.” In asserting this “greatness,” he was evidently associating German high culture with the crimes of Hitler. A bold man. Nothing in the world could force him to retreat from the philosophic conclusions he had reached. And he was prepared, if necessary, to sail through an ocean of blood. This is a subject which cannot be avoided in a discussion of the Jewish writer.

Lionel Abel tells us in his memoirs that in 1946 he took his mother to the movies, and there in a newsreel they watched the arrival of the American troops in the Buchenwald concentration camp. They saw on the screen mounds of dead bodies, emaciated survivors, gas chambers, and gallows; altogether an unforgettable sight. But as remarkable was what Abel’s mother said to him when they left the theater. She said, “I don’t think the Jews can ever get over the disgrace of this.” She said nothing about the moral disgrace to the German nation, only about a more than moral disgrace incurred by the Jews: how would they ever get over it?

I cite this not because I admire Lionel Abel, but because I admire his mother. I too had seen newsreels of the camps. In one of them, American bulldozers pushed naked corpses toward a mass grave ditch. Limbs fell away and heads dropped from disintegrating bodies. My reaction to this was similar to that of Mrs. Abel: a deeply troubling sense of disgrace or human demotion, as if by such afflictions the Jews had lost the respect of humankind; as if they might now be regarded as hopeless victims, incapable of honorable self-defense; and, arising from this, probably the common, instinctive revulsion or loathing of the extremities of suffering, a sense of personal contamination and aversion. The world would see these degraded dead with a pity that placed them at the margins of humanity. In part, the founders of Israel restored the respect of the Jews by their manliness. They removed the curse of the Holocaust, of the abasement of victimization from them; and for this the Jews of the Diaspora were grateful and repaid Israel with their loyal support.

Still, the disgrace felt by Mrs. Abel hovers over us. It must be dealt with. It is not merely “something” in history, but a spiritual ordeal for

all of us. I sometimes ask myself how we are to navigate the nihilistic abysses of the modern world. The thought suggests itself that Jews, through the horrors of Jewish suffering, might logically stand apart from Western nihilism. If they wished to separate themselves from modern European nihilism, it is not impossible that they may have a legitimate option to exercise. I am assuming here that they themselves have not been contaminated by nihilism. I will not try here to define this condition more than to say that nihilism denies the existence of any distinct, substantial self. This lack of self-substance makes all persons nugatory, insignificant. If we are insignificant, what is done to us matters less perhaps. Still, those who are killed need not accept their definition from the killers and have their humanity taken from them as well as their lives. The burden of valuation is on the killer, whose ground is nihilistic. Those destroyed were not invited into Nothingness; they had it thrust upon them. We are therefore free to withdraw (to withdraw our minds where we cannot withdraw our bodies) from situations in which our humanity or the lack of it is defined for us in such a fashion. It was the judgment of the slayers that slaughter was permitted, that the slain had at best a trivial claim to existence based on untenable fictions of their special mission as a people. Theorists of euthanasia, of course, had long ago consented to the destruction of the unfit. Even mild vegetarian Fabians like George Bernard Shaw (there were others) agreed that measures should be taken by a progressive society to rid itself of defective types. These socially and historically "progressive" reforms were applied in Central Europe by the Nazis with programmatic rigidity and with a demonic irony to the Jews and other peoples judged superfluous. It is the concept of superfluity which is at the bottom of this nihilism.

It would be a mistake to set aside as unimportant, on modern grounds, the age-long inclination to connect the spiritual order in the universe with our own lives. In our pragmatic attitude toward the social order, we leave no room for the influence of higher beliefs on our own particular views of morality. In his short book *Death of the Soul*, the late philosopher William Barrett offers a useful discussion of the consequence of the disappearance, the destruction in fact, of the self. He examines critically Heidegger's treatment of the human being. How, in Heidegger's view, *are* we in the world? We ask of Heidegger: who is the being who is undergoing all these various modes of being? Or, in more traditional language, who is the subject, the "I," that underlies or persists through all these various modes of our being? And here Heidegger evades us. "We are nothing," he says, "but an aggregate of modes of being, and any organizing or unifying center we profess to find there is something we ourselves have forged or contrived."

Barrett responds, "Thus there is a gaping hole at the center of any human being, at least as Heidegger describes this being. Consequently, we have in the end to acknowledge a certain desolate or empty quality about his thought, however we may admire the originality or novelty of its construction." And Barrett asks, "How can a being without a center really be ethical?" He concludes: "[Heidegger] cannot be dismissed: that desolate and empty picture of being he gives may be just the sense of being that is at work in our whole culture, and we are in his debt for having brought it to the surface. To get beyond him we shall have to live through that sense of being in order to reach the other side."

To this, I should like to add that questions which can be closed by philosophic argument can remain open for art, and it is therefore a mistake for writers to accept the preeminence of the philosophers and write poems, novels, and plays to illustrate, to confirm, to work out in their art and in human detail, the thoughts given abstractly by distinguished (and also by undistinguished) thinkers. Neither the philosopher nor the scientist can tell the artist conclusively, definitively, what it is to be human.

But enough of this for the moment. I said earlier that the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century was to suffer the cruelties of nihilistic thought and nihilistic politics. I did not say that the Jews – the survivors and descendants themselves – escaped altogether the desolate and empty picture of being that Barrett correctly tells us "is at work in the whole culture." All of us living in the West must endure this desolation. The feelings it transmits, the motives it instills in us, the human states our surroundings make us familiar with, the invasive force of these states which we are constrained to submit to, the coloration they give to our personalities, the mutilations they inflict on us, and the overwhelming shaping powers of a nihilism now commonplace do not spare anybody. Philosophers sometimes tell us that in the eyes of science, nature itself is soulless. One of the effects of this premise of soullessness, perhaps, is to turn the imagination in a literal direction. We speak of this as demystification, but it may just as aptly be called dismemberment or fragmentation. Corpse-making trench warfare in 1914 made this fragmentation universally familiar. Leninist Russia justified this as revolutionary severity. Intellectuals in Weimar Germany took pride in the realism and hardness this view of nature inspired. Edmund Burke identified this in 1789 as revolutionary reductionism – a Queen is only a woman, he wrote, and a woman is only a piece of flesh. In a similar frame of mind, Jews were used by Nazi doctors as laboratory animals. The remains of millions of people became a problem in garbage treatment, a technical challenge in waste disposal.

What this brings into prominence is the special view of the Jews held

throughout history in Western countries. In the post-Napoleonic era, Jews briefly enjoyed the rights of citizenship, but they remained in some ways an expendable population. It is perhaps a fundamental social necessity in all societies to divide population into “we” and “they” categories, and “they” may be human beings to whom the rules do not fully apply. Against *these*, criminal acts and atrocities may be committed with impunity. Thus one does not necessarily suffer when “they,” the expendables, are killed. In rereading Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* recently, I observed that the old woman, Raskolnikov’s first victim because she is a moneylender, is classed as a Jew. It is not so much *her* death that troubles Raskolnikov, for she is marginally expendable. What does burden his conscience is the murder of her innocent sister – a Christian innocent or holy fool (*yurodivy*).

I do give a lot of thought to the special and in some ways occult place assigned to Jews. To me, this is of course more than theoretical curiosity. My interpretation of the recent increase of hostility among American blacks toward Jews is that the blacks have a clear reason for dissociating themselves from these eternal expendables, for they see that in making a common cause with Jews they would risk exchanging transitory disadvantages for permanent ones. Jew-hatred, moreover, is never wholly unpopular, and this is as clear to black demagogues as it was to Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, Rumanians, and others in the past. The demagogic instinct of a Farrakhan is to identify blacks with a higher white stratum and leave the Jews at the bottom – human beings on permanent reserve for inhuman treatment.

I have a very particular sympathy for what I see as distortions in black life, a sympathy rooted in my lifelong familiarity with deformities in Jews produced by their experiences in the Pale. I think often of an essay by Rebecca West in which she discusses the Jewishness of Kafka: “Russia,” she observes in an aside, “has succeeded in oppressing its Jews until they have become nightmare figures which the Western Jew did not like to recognize as brethren, since, isolated and terrorized, shut up with their religion in a state of tension which revived all their primitive fantasies, they became at once barbaric and pedantic.” But what she sees as a Russian deformation has existed in other forms for centuries in all Christian countries. In them, the Jew has a mental place, unconscious or preconscious. I am more and more inclined to see this as a spiritual legacy. There are Christian hermetic philosophers like Robert Ambelain and Valentin Tomberg who speak of the *egregore*, an artificial being generated by powerful spiritual currents, a collective delusion coming from below but having a spiritual character; “an artificial being,” says Ambelain, “a product of fanaticism and enthusiasm.” He sees this in the

great world religions, and, more to the point, in modern political ideologies. For scientists, says Tomberg, the human soul itself (considered as a notion) may be an *egregore* generated collectively by hundreds of millions of individual cells. Such notions take us very far afield. But we have already been carried far out by Jewish history, and it may be just as sensible to look for understanding in the depths as in the shallows. If there are spiritual entities coming from above there may be others rising from below. Anti-Semitism – Jew-hatred – may be one of the most enduring of these *egregores*.

In any case, this is not an invitation to speculate on hermetic ideas. It is rather a confession. Something with Kabbalistic affinities. Let us leave it there.

Where there are problems it is generally thought that there are solutions. Indeed there is no point in formulating a problem if one gives up all hope of finding an answer. But what if the Jewish problem should be one for which there is no solution? Viciousness against Jews will never end in any foreseeable future. Nor will the consciousness of being a Jew vanish, since the self-respect of Jews demands that they be faithful to their history and their culture, which is not so much a culture in the modern sense as it is a millennial loyalty to revelation and the belief in redemption. A philosopher whose views on the subject of Judaism have influenced me says that those modern Jews for whom the old faith has gone will prize it as a noble delusion. Assimilation is an impossible, a repulsive alternative. What is left to us is the contemplation of Jewish history. “The Jewish people and their fate are the living witness for the absence of redemption,” this philosopher writes, and he states further that the meaning of the Chosen People is to testify to this: “. . . the Jews are chosen to prove the absence of redemption. It is supposed . . . that the world is not the creation of the just and living God, the Holy God, and that for the absence of righteousness and charity we sinful creatures are responsible. A delusion? A dream? But no nobler dream was ever dreamt.”

I said at the beginning of this talk, “My first consciousness was that of a cosmos, and in that cosmos, I was a Jew.” After seventy-odd years, some fifty of which have been spent in writing books, I can do no more than describe what has happened, can only offer myself as an illustration. The record will show what the twentieth century has made of me, and what I made of the twentieth century. Thank you.

John Gross: Saul Bellow has given us a very powerful address, as your applause signifies. I can only offer a few scattered remarks by comparison. But I do want to try and have a stab at one very big question: what

kind of future does anti-Semitism have? That it does have a future, in one shape or another, is something on which I think – alas – we can all agree. I am not certain that I would want to put the case as strongly as Saul Bellow has. But anti-Semitism is one of the great expressions of human baseness; there is nothing to suggest that baseness is going to go away in the near future and no reason to suppose that one of its proven outlets is going to vanish just like that, either.

Certainly history teaches us to be cautious – as Jews, very cautious. Perhaps I can risk telling a joke that I heard recently, in the hope that it is not yet a chestnut. We are in Russia, some time after the fall of Communism. A Jew applies for a job; he has all the necessary qualifications, but he is turned down out of hand. He protests: surely he should at least get an interview? The official decides to be open with him: “We don’t give jobs to Jews.” The Jew is shocked: “I knew that things were like that under the old regime, but I thought that now everything was different.” The official looks at him hard: “We *especially* don’t give jobs to *stupid* Jews.”

Well, none of us want to be stupid Jews. None of us want to be caught out. A degree of caution seems at the very least a form of psychological insurance.

But how great a degree? I return to my original question: what kind of future does this monstrous phenomenon have? And I find myself faced, as I often do when considering anti-Semitism at large, with the problem of balancing personal impressions and reactions against larger reflections; with weighing the prevailing circumstances of the world in which I live against conditions in other societies or the lessons of the past.

It’s a problem which we all face, no more so than in the English-speaking world. Most Jews in the United States and the lesser English-speaking communities seem to me, all said and done, “at ease in Zion”. To discuss their (or our) affairs against the broader backdrop of Jewish history is to find oneself juxtaposing the logical and mundane with the tragic and apocalyptic. They are part of the same story, but it is hard to maintain the necessary double focus.

To complete matters, the contours of anti-Semitism itself are much less easily defined today than they were in the past. Perhaps it is anti-Semites rather than Jews who ought to learn to talk about anti-Semitism in the plural (often connected or overlapping, but still distinct from one another) rather than about a single anti-Semitism.

It has always been a bit like that, no doubt – we simplify the past in retrospect – but I think we can still say that until very recently there was something called classic anti-Semitism. It varied from culture to culture,

from period to period; it came in virulent or weaker forms; but throughout all of its transmutations it was still recognizably the same phenomenon, a phenomenon very much shaped (not exclusively, but predominantly) by Christian culture. William Phillips in his introduction kindly mentioned the book I wrote on Shylock, and initially I thought it would make sense for me to refer back to that book in this symposium. Yet the more I reflected on present-day conditions, the less I felt inclined to do so. Shylock brings together many of the motifs of medieval anti-Semitism and points forward to their development in the later modern world. Those stereotypes certainly linger on, but modern anti-Semitism is more diffuse and fragmented. It has developed new themes and taken some very perverse turns. Forty or fifty years ago, people at a conference like this might have hazarded all kinds of predictions about its future, but I doubt whether they would have been able to predict a Zhirinovskiy or a Louis Farrakhan. Anti-Semitism has adapted itself to new contexts; it has adopted new guises – and disguises.

No one could deny that there have been some disquieting developments in the past two or three years, in Europe especially. Yet if I had to sum up the prospects, I would say, at the risk of sounding Pollyanna-ish, that I am reasonably optimistic about what the future holds, or at least – perhaps it is as far as one should ever go on such a subject – reasonably unpessimistic.

Let me be local, even parochial, and tell you a story. It is a tale that might well have been concocted by a writer of anti-Semitic bent; if I were in a teasing mood I could leave you to guess whether it came from Hilaire Belloc, who wrote novels on very similar themes, or from one of the thrillers of John Buchan – admirable thrillers in many ways, though not in their racial attitudes. Anyway, here it is.

A Jew from an obscure part of Eastern Central Europe arrives in England. Starting from nowhere, he accumulates an enormous fortune. Those who know him realize that he has amassed it by the most ruthless and brutal means, though he is able to keep up a facade as a public benefactor. He changes his name to one which nobody would take to be Jewish; when the question of his Jewishness is raised, he announces that he is a member of the Church of England. (In the eyes of Belloc or Buchan, this would of course make him more sinister still.) Then, in his later years, he reverts to his origins. He dies, and although for most of his career he has been firmly embedded in English public life, he is buried in Israel. His funeral – an Orthodox Jewish funeral – takes place on the Mount of Olives, amid a blaze of international publicity. Within days of his dying, his malfeasances are exposed: they involve colossal swindles of a particularly nasty kind, including ripping off five hundred million pounds from a pension fund. Thousands of ordinary workers see their pensions

disappear.

If Belloc or Buchan *had* devised such a story, we would be suitably offended. In fact what I have given is an account (if anything, a toned-down account) of the career of the late Robert Maxwell. And the interesting thing is that the revelations about Maxwell after his death – and hard on the heels of his funeral – were attended by little if any anti-Semitic comment, even at the level of innuendo. We must be careful; we don't know what people say behind our backs. But we can make deductions, and we do know what people said in the past, quite openly about much smaller-scale episodes. An affair of this magnitude would once have produced a torrent of anti-Semitic comment, possibly even anti-Semitic violence. In the 1990s, the dogs didn't bark. And though the Maxwell story is a particularly lurid one, the recent past (think of Wall Street) affords numerous instances of anti-Semitic reaction being largely conspicuous by its absence. Something seems to have changed. A pessimist would say it's merely that people are temporarily inhibited from venting their prejudices fitfully. What impresses me is how fitfully.

Britain isn't France or Germany; the countries of Western Europe aren't the countries of Eastern Europe; there is a different tale to be told everywhere. Yet surveying the picture as whole, I think we should be careful to keep our nerve: grounds for concern are not necessarily grounds for alarm.

Take the case of Hungary, where there has just been a general election. Anti-Semitic feelings undoubtedly played a considerable part in that election, to the extent that the leader of the main liberal opposition party, who was Jewish, was withdrawn and replaced with a more "acceptable" non-Jewish figure. I'm depressed at the thought, as I am sure we all are, but I can't say that I am particularly shocked: it would have been too much to hope that some measure of anti-Semitism would not have resurfaced amid the turmoil of the post-Communist era. I also console myself with the thought that it could have been much worse. In the actual election results, the anti-Semitic nationalists, who looked more threatening a year or two back, were effectively marginalized. And there seem to be good grounds for hoping that we are over the worst elsewhere in post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe – provided that (and of course it is a big "if") general social stability prevails.

As for Germany, the activities of the far right in that country must of course give us a particular shudder. But we should keep them in proportion. Equally, we can hardly help being especially sensitive to the insensitivities of Germans in high places – we all remember Chancellor Kohl at Bitburg. But it would be utterly misleading to jump to the conclusion that Kohl and his regime are anti-Semitic. They are not, as

they have demonstrated again and again; neither are their principal parliamentary opponents; and *that*, after all, in addressing the German future, is the first consideration.

Let me add one caveat. The decline or curtailment of anti-Semitism would not necessarily solve everything; we shouldn't assume that threats to Jews are always anti-Semitic in origin. The fact that the German authorities have recently feted the head of Iranian intelligence, for example, is arguably much more ominous, in its possible effect on Jewish lives, than anything so far perpetrated by neo-Nazis and skinheads. But who can suppose that the welcome he received had anything to do with anti-Semitism? It was plainly prompted by simple realpolitik – which doesn't make it any less dangerous.

In the same way, the largest potential danger (perhaps the only really serious one) facing the Jews in Eastern Europe is an indirect one – in the first instance, at least. As a child and grandchild of immigrants, I often feel that I have no right to any negative feelings about immigration at all. But it is too easy to say, as many liberal commentators in Western Europe do, that the immigration question would be a non-issue if it had not been “problematized” by right-wing governments. Daily observation suggests that it is a problem, in and of itself; and it is no consolation that for many of the fascist or semi-fascist groups who trade on anti-immigrant feeling, Jews no longer loom large on the ostensible agenda. Such groups are loathsome themselves; and anti-Semitism always turns out to be an inseparable part of the package.

I have touched on some dangers; if I had more time, it would be easy enough to remind you of others. Yet I persist in remaining mildly sanguine. The world may not have been totally transformed, but there have been changes circulated to make anti-Semitism much less of a menace that it once was. Two obvious ones are guilt and embarrassment about the Holocaust and respect (even when it is reluctant respect) for the State of Israel. It is true that many hostile critics of Israel have also shown an obsessional need to equate Israelis and Nazis – which is of course one way of trying to slough off guilt about the Holocaust. But this is a pathological subplot: the main effect of the Nazi era has been to discredit anti-Semitism, and the main effect of the creation of Israel has been to make Jews look less vulnerable.

There is an equally big factor, perhaps an even bigger one, which should be taken into account: the increased integration of Jews, at an ever-accelerating rate, into the societies in which they live. Integration and assimilation don't in themselves guarantee freedom from prejudice; what happened in Germany is a standing warrant against supposing that they do. Yet I believe that, when it is taken in conjunction with other

changes (including those I have mentioned), the degree of integration that has been achieved in most countries – and certainly in the United States – makes the emergence of mainstream political anti-Semitism highly unlikely.

That we must still be vigilant goes without saying. But we should not overreact; we should not allow ourselves to be startled by every mouse, as opposed to the real rats. To do so seems to me objectionable on three counts. It is unhealthy; very often it is also counterproductive. And if we are not careful, it can lead us to accord the enemy another victory. However grievous a part it has played, we don't want to end up using anti-Semitism as the yardstick by which Jewish history and Jewish identity are defined.

Cynthia Ozick: Anti-Semitism – the word itself – is a nineteenth-century euphemism drawn from philology and coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, a German agitator. Arabic and Hebrew are both Semitic languages, but the targets of anti-Semitism are hardly Syrians or Iraqis; and when Willa Cather in *The Professor's House* describes a character's nose as "Semitic," she does not mean us to understand that he is an Arab. It was the Enlightenment and its consequences that required a new term for assailing Jews. If Christ-killing was no longer the issue; if both Resurrection and Eucharist were undone by secularist or scientific doubt; if "There is no God, and the Jews killed him" could not logically stand – then what can the Jews be guilty of, religiously speaking? The solution was to stop speaking religiously. To say that you are against the Semites has a more reasonable air than saying you are against the Jews – a plausibly scientific cast, redolent of linguistics or physical anthropology.

Poor Wilhelm Marr! His scholarly coinage was betrayed by his compatriots. You cannot in the name of anti-Semitism dehumanize and annihilate one-third of a living people, you cannot hang, shoot, gas and burn millions of human beings, and still hope for the term to pull up its suspenders and keep its philological dignity. The euphemism is, in the language of its inventor, *kaput*.

When one euphemism deteriorates, another evolves to take its place. A writer in the letters columns of the April 25th, 1994 *New Yorker*, after identifying himself as "an Arab-American and professor of Middle Eastern history," begins in candor: "Anti-Semitism certainly exists among Arabs and has been propagated by some Arab regimes. But one must note," he continues, "that numerous Arabs, at both a popular and official level, have been able to differentiate between Zionism or Zionist policies and Judaism and Jews." Since the letter-writer is highly educated, he will not stoop to the pretense that anti-Semitism is a term designed to include

Arabs as objects of its abuse. But he is cynic enough, and propagandist enough, to urge us to believe that an anti-Zionist is something different from an anti-Semite. His arguments appear under an arresting headline: "Drawing Distinctions." It is not distinctions that are being drawn, but the opposite: a blurry veil. Try to look through the gauze, and you will see cloudiness, cover-up, duplicity, malice. The term anti-Zionism – like its predecessor, anti-Semitism – is born in mendacity.

We may wish, ourselves, to draw a distinction between sophisticated mendacity and barbarous assault. But again, since the intent is the same, the distinction is gossamer. The professorial or journalistic anti-Zionist – sometimes his name is Edward Said, sometimes his name is Alexander Cockburn – implies that history does not cling to Jews, that Jews, like Lear on the heath, are unaccommodated by a civilization of rights, laws, land, history. To what other people has the morally and politically diseased phrase, "the right to exist," been applied? For the post-Enlightenment Western anti-Zionist, Zionists are not the genuine Jewish article. A Jew may merit narrow religious recognition; a Zionist is an inauthentic Johnny-come-lately who must be uprooted, and never mind that most Zionists are, as it happens, Jews.

How does this professorial view, with its polished lingo, distinguish itself from the incantations of that now-famous university lecturer, Khalid Muhammad? "The so-called Jew, I must say so-called Jew, because you're not the true Jew, you are Johnny-come-lately Jew who just crawled out of the caves of Europe just a little over four thousand years ago. You're not from the original people," Khalid Muhammad declaims. He, too, would grant Jews their rights, if only they were the genuine article. But they are not: "You are a European strain of people who crawled around on your all fours in the caves and hills of Europe, eating juniper roots and eating each other. . . . You know nothing about bathrooms and toilets and restrooms and sanitation systems. You did your Number One and your Number Two, your pee-pee and your doo-doo . . . right in the caves and hills of Europe. You slept in your urination and your defecation, generation after generation, for two thousand years. . . . You knocked your animals in the head with clubs and boulders and bricks . . . and all of you would just gum them and eat the fur, the filth, and suck the blood from the raw meat, and you still eat your meat raw, to this very day."

That the speaker stems from an historically victimized segment of the American population should not surprise. The Dreyfus conspiracy was conducted at the top of a society; so was the Wannsee conspiracy to destroy every living Jew; the Zionism-is-racism canard was for a generation the unrevoked slogan of a political organization consisting of the elite of all nations. But the more familiar anti-Jewish pogroms that

punctuate Europe's long chronicle were, by and large, the work of the most despised, the most deprived, the most oppressed. The preoccupation of the despised and the deprived is very often the body; it may be that the body is the only possession of the poor, and is the poor's fixation.

The Beilis case, a blood libel trial that inflamed Czarist Russia in 1911, rehearsed the old news that Jews have boils on their buttocks; that four times a year Jewish food becomes toxic through the appearance of droplets of contaminating blood; that annually on a certain night all Jews go mad. Menachem Beilis himself was accused of murdering a Christian child for the purpose of draining his body of blood for ritual use. (This in 1911, when curmudgeonly American intellectuals were grappling with the horrors of post-Impressionism!) The murderers were a gang of peasant thieves, including the dead boy's mother. In the Beilis trial, the elite and the dregs, the Czar's government and the cutthroats at the bottom of the heap, happily embraced.

We can catch a reflection of this joining of high and low in our own mental neighborhoods. Three and four decades ago, Arnold Toynbee, in volume after volume, attributed all the world's barbarism to the Jewish ingredient in Western culture; the American white middle class turned him into a bestseller, and his themes are nowadays peddled by Farrakhan. Currently, colleges are generously opening their auditoriums to anti-Jewish doo-doo talk one week, to mockery of the Holocaust the next. Gullible young editors of student newspapers, mistaking paid advertising for a free-speech issue, publish the soul-freezing propositions of the Holocaust deniers. The group-think that strangles intellect under the fake rubric of multiculturalism blocks entrance to Jewish intellect. As for contemporary American writers, there is not much room for Jews at any table. The self-described mainstream instructs Jews to go sit with the ethnics at the multiculturalists' table; the multiculturalists quite properly see Jews as conceptually prominent among the pillars of the West, and toil at undermining those pillars. Multiculturalism, let us remember, is not the same as pluralism. As a rivalrous collection of accusatory injuries, it is the antithesis of pluralism. With the emphasis everywhere given to victimization and competitive grievance, Jews themselves begin to forget that they are defined by the civilization they bear, not by its enemies.

Psalm 27: "False witnesses rise up against me, such as breathe out violence." But scapegoats are universal. Tribal hatred appears to be endemic in human conduct. The murdered litter the soil of six bloody continents: only the barrenness of Antarctica is exempt. In Arthur Miller's new play, *Broken Glass*, a Jewish doctor, contemplating with detachment the brutality of Nazi Germany in 1938, is eager to remind us that though it is *also* the Jews, it isn't *only* the Jews. "I have all kinds coming into my of-

fice," the doctor says, "and there's not one of them who one way or another isn't persecuted. Yes. *Everybody's* persecuted. The poor by the rich, the rich by the poor, the black by the white, the white by the black, the men by the women, the women by the men, the Catholics by the Protestants, the Protestants by the Catholics." If the doctor were theorizing in 1994, he would add Croats, Serbs, Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Tibetans, Zulus, Qhosas, Tutsis, and a hundred others. "And of course," he concludes in an ironic turn, "all of them [are persecuted] by the Jews." What the doctor hopes to urge on us is that anti-Semitism is simply an instance of the prevalence of scapegoats, perhaps a little more resilient, but surely not different in kind.

Let us return to the body. Over the whole stretch of the globe, only a Jew has been elevated to become the Body of God, and only Jews have been charged with hanging and piercing the Body of God. Yet the Jew as reviler of divinity, and the blood libel itself, are older than Christianity. Damocritus, a Greek chronicler, claimed that once every seven years Jews kidnapped a foreigner and cut up his body into little pieces. Apion, in a later version, said that the Jews ate the entrails of the murdered man while swearing an oath of hatred. Manetho, an Egyptian priest, explained that the Hebrews were lepers whose aim was to destroy the temples of Egypt. Lysimachus ascribed to Moses the injunction to desecrate the gods of Greece. For the Greeks, the Jews were atheists: they did not bow to the Pantheon. For Christianity, the Jews were anti-Christ: they did not acknowledge the divine nature of Jesus. The reformers Luther and Mohammed, having rooted out local idolatries, summoned the Jews to join in the new revelation. When the Jews would not yield, Luther compared the Talmud to turds and the Koran declared that in the circumstance of their unbelief the Jews were as apes.

It is true that the stranger and the alien are everywhere scorned. Tribe battles tribe. Ancient antipathies erupt, social patterns alter and squeeze, land and borders embitter, economic tribulations press hard. The persecutors find their reasons; terror alibis ax and bomb. Imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, Marxism, fundamentalism, the gulag, the slave trade, the Trail of Tears, the Armenian genocide, and on and on: the roster of villainies engenders its roster of victims. Every scapegoat is the spawn of one *ism* or another. Every *ism* lusts to spew out a foreign body. For every Crusade, a Jewish community bloodied. For every Stalin, a Doctors' Plot. Yes, it is *also* the Jews, but it is not *only* the Jews. Jews become victims for the same reasons many other groups have been victimized, in one place or another, because of this folly or that: the insanity over the presence of Jews has a thousand parallels.

Here is a hypothesis that explains everything. Its sociological plausi-

bility may be indisputable: everybody gets a turn at being persecuted, and the Jews' turn comes round a little more often. Such a thesis is sound, logical, perhaps even accurate. It is also insufficient and pedestrian, and hardly takes into account the mythological wires that animate the human brain. It is a perspective that fits best into those minds that seek, above all, safety in "normality," in the majority, in invisibility. The other side of persecution as an equal-opportunity principle – its positive outcome – is the principle of universal tolerance. Yet it is one of the most bitter predicaments of recent Jewish history that this universalist credo, transmogrified into totalitarian messianism, became a significant persecutor of Jews. The historian J. L. Talmon notes that for the Jews who were drawn into totalitarian messianism at its hopeful inception, "the atrophy of Jewish life did not seem too high a price to pay for equal status." It may all have ended in the gulag, but first it bought Jewish silence in the face of the growing exclusion of Jews.

The God of Israel has no body. The Covenant celebrates no blood. The burial place of Moses is unknown, explicitly to prevent a material shrine: that no one may worship a prince or a prophet or even a teacher.

And just here can be discovered a difference. It may be that anti-Semitism arises because the Jews as a people say No to the easily familiar, to the expected, to the seemingly natural. The Jews as a people say No to polytheism, because many gods divide humankind, and the vision of Unity draws us to mercy. The Jews as a people say No to fatalism, because Kismet is slavery, and hinders flexibility, compromise, experiment, a way out. While anyone may become a Jew, no one *must* become a Jew as the only way to truth. The Jews as a people say No to exclusivity, and No to infidel doctrine, and attribute the full blessings of righteousness to anyone who lives in a community where there are courts of justice, and who eschew adultery, incest, theft, murder, the consumption of flesh from a living animal. These are the No's of compassion and obligation, and the Jews as a people of inheritance are entrusted to bear these and others, in all their difficult grandeur. It goes without saying that a Jew as ordinary human clay falters under their weight, fails them, deserts them, resents them, runs with all the rest to do evil – but it is an inheritance all the same, whether embraced or betrayed. The Jews as a covenanted people are committed to the imagination of incorporeality; this stands as a reprimand to those whose imaginations are bounded by the body's frame.

Anti-Semitism, it seems to me, is exactly this: a self-administered reprimand to its perpetrators and servants, who respond by painting the Jew as they see themselves. Say that the Jew is a savage, and you confess to

your own savagery. Libel the Jew with blood ritual, and you describe your own practice. Declare that the Jew suppresses your nationhood, and you admit to your enduring refusal of Jewish sovereignty. When the Jewish state defends itself against attack, cry aggression. Cry racism when the Jewish state opens its arms to refugees of every color, to Vietnamese boat people, to Bosnian Muslims. On the American campus, profess diversity and malign the Jews. Whatever you are – maligner, reviler, aggressor, oppressor, racist, strongman, murderer, liar, denier – to see your own face, look to what you say of the Jews.

Anti-Semitism is the anti-Semite's looking glass. Anti-Semitism is a kind of Platonism; it has no need of real Jews. It can thrive where no Jews have ever lived, or where all the Jews are already dead. Anti-Semitism has nothing to do with Jews; it is not about Jews. It is, it always has been, it always will be, about the body and soul of the anti-Semite.

Edith Kurzweil: I want to thank the speakers. We have time for only a question or two from the floor, so here's the first one: How do you account for the anti-Semitism of American blacks and how can we deal with it?

Saul Bellow: Well, these are very touchy questions, and they should be discussed in as reserved and moderate a way as possible, because the facts are inflammatory, and there doesn't seem to be any language for public discussion of these questions in the United States at all. They have been under a taboo for so long that it's a little weird to see how people prefer to hold opinions rather than to discuss points of view. So I don't feel, with lights shining in my eyes and before a large audience, that I should really tell you what I actually think about these things.

I've had some personal experience with this, one way or another. There was a case a few years ago in which I involved myself. People in the office of Mayor Sawyer – the black mayor of Chicago – who were connected to the Farrakhan organization started a conspiracy charge going, namely that Jewish doctors in hospitals were infecting black children with AIDS. To my astonishment there was not a single black leader in the Chicago community who questioned this. They all seemed to accept it. They said, "Well, um, maybe other doctors are doing it too, and not only the Jewish doctors." Leaders of the black community in Chicago went on to affirm these allegations. Black members of the Congress concurred with them. This man who had started the rumor was eventually let go, after great pressure was brought to bear on the Mayor's office. But he was taken to the floor of the Democratic convention that year by the national convention, by Congressman

Savage. It was not just the black leaders of Chicago who didn't respond. Nobody responded. Nobody except for a Catholic friend of mine, who wrote a piece in *The New York Times* about it. The Chicago papers immediately attacked him. The *Chicago Tribune* attacked him for damaging the reputation of the city of Chicago in a national newspaper. I then wrote a piece for the *Chicago Tribune* on this subject, pointing out how very dangerous the whole thing was and how much dynamite there was in these charges, and what public irresponsibility there was among the people in politics and the people in public life, none of whom stepped forward to discuss this. They all agreed that the subject was taboo and that it had to be endured rather than discussed. This is very common now in the United States, and I think that in itself is just as interesting a question as the question of the anti-Semitism of the blacks. The blacks have felt it necessary not to acknowledge the Jewish assistance during the civil rights struggle because they don't want to be beholden to them. But the question is a very complicated one, and it could lead us into some rather nasty discussions, and I would rather not take it up just now.

Edith Kurzweil: I've been told that it's getting late, so I'd like to thank the speakers for having given us a wonderful evening. And I want to remind you that tomorrow's meeting is at nine o'clock, at 130 East 59th Street, and that the proceedings will be printed in the Summer issue of *Partisan Review*. Thank you all for coming.



Edith Kurzweil: Good morning. Welcome to you all at this second day of our conference. We will have two sessions this morning. Norman Podhoretz and Robert Wistrich will begin the first one. I want to thank last night's speakers for opening up so many avenues of discussion. I will refrain from asking my own questions, which I'm quite sure are going to be brought up among today's six speakers, but I do want to clarify just one point. We organized this conference not to bemoan the fact that Jews throughout history have been victims, but to get intelligent individuals who have spent much time delving into the question to pool their insights and exchange their views and their approaches to these issues. There will be time for you all to ask questions.

Now I will introduce the speakers. First is Norman Podhoretz, who has been the Editor-in-Chief of *Commentary* magazine since 1960. He is the author of *The Bloody Crossroads: Where Literature and Politics Meet*; *Why We Were in Vietnam*; *The Present Danger*; and *Breaking Ranks: A*

Political Memoir, among other books. He is a member of the Council of Foreign Relations and served from 1981 to 1987 as Chairman of the New Directions Advisory Board of the United States Information Agency.

The next speaker is Robert Wistrich: he is Erich and Foga Neuberger Professor of Modern Jewish History at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In addition, he is Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at London University. He is the author most recently of *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*. Without further ado, Norman Podhoretz.

Norman Podhoretz: I want to talk about anti-Semitism in America today, but there's a problem. Once upon a time, anti-Semites proudly proclaimed themselves as such, but thanks to the Holocaust, not even the most egregious anti-Semite today is willing to admit that he is one. Today anti-Semites want to be allowed to say anti-Semitic things without being called anti-Semites. My view is that if they don't want to be called anti-Semites, they should stop saying anti-Semitic things.

My view also is that what matters in assessing the extent of anti-Semitism is not so much the existence of anti-Semites – for such people will always exist so long as there are Jews, and maybe even if there were no Jews, as the example of Poland more or less demonstrates today – but the way they are treated by society. If they are shunned, relegated to the margins, regarded as disreputable, then we can say that the problem is only a minor nuisance. If, on the other hand, anti-Semites are tolerated, or worse, encouraged – if, that is, they can operate with impunity or even be rewarded – then we have something to worry about.

For approximately two decades after World War II, the first condition prevailed. Anti-Semites certainly existed in America, but after the Holocaust had demonstrated where it could lead, the open expression of anti-Semitism became for all practical purposes taboo. That taboo was first broken by black radicals in the late sixties, in connection with the Six Day War of 1967 and the New York teachers' strike in that same year. Suddenly things were being written and said by blacks about Jews that had not been heard in America for a very long time. Yet the blacks who were saying these things were more likely to be given a grant by the Ford Foundation than to be shunned. It was those of us who called attention to this development and expressed anxiety about it who were shunned and accused – not for the last time – of racism.

Admittedly there was some resistance both from blacks and whites to the emergence of anti-Semitism among black radicals, but not nearly enough to stop it in its tracks or prevent it from spilling over into other segments of the black community. Today, twenty-five years later, we see

the results in the prominent position and the influence achieved among middle-class blacks by an openly anti-Semitic black leader like Louis Farrakhan – though of course he too denies being anti-Semitic – and his follower Khalid Muhammad, not to mention countless others, many of them professors at leading colleges and universities. (A particularly disgusting example is Professor Tony Martin of Wellesley College.) No wonder that all studies show a much higher level of anti-Semitism among blacks than among whites – notwithstanding the bitter fact that Jews stubbornly continue to be the white group most sympathetic to black concerns and interests.

But it was not only among black radicals that the taboo against the open expression of anti-Semitism was broken in 1967. Something similar occurred on the left in general. Mostly it appeared in the guise of a hostility to Israel that was hard to distinguish from old-fashioned anti-Semitism. This new anti-Zionism, as it called itself, simply took many of the classical anti-Semitic canards about Jews living in the Diaspora and applied them, suitably transposed, to the Jewish State.

Here, too, there was resistance, but again not enough to prevent this new updated species of anti-Semitism from spreading. Fifteen years later, when Israel invaded Lebanon, the attacks more often than not went beyond simple criticism or even political opposition to Zionism and crossed the line into outright anti-Semitism.

This part of the story has its own Farrakhan, in the person of Gore Vidal. In 1986 Vidal wrote a piece for the one hundred-twentieth anniversary issue of *The Nation* that impressed me as the most blatantly anti-Semitic outburst to have appeared in a respectable American periodical since the end of World War II. Because I myself was one of Vidal's targets, my response to this piece was widely treated as merely personal, part of an ongoing literary feud. Still, a number of people, including many who, to put it mildly, had no love for me, agreed with my assessment of Vidal's piece and registered protests. Yet in spite of these protests, Vidal, who naturally denied that his piece was anti-Semitic, was not discredited or shunned, as he most certainly would have been twenty years earlier. On the contrary, he continued to be sought out and lionized by the media, and a collection of his essays which included the infamous anti-Semitic diatribe – not altered in the slightest, incidentally; it was the unexpurgated, unbowdlerized version – was not considered to have been disfigured by it. The book was praised to the skies by the reviewers and awarded a major literary prize.

It was developments like these that persuaded me that anti-Semitism was now finding a more hospitable reception on the left than on the right. In fact, for a while it looked to me as though anti-Semitism

would no longer be tolerated on the American right – certainly not to the degree that it was being tolerated on the left both among blacks and whites. For example, the Holocaust deniers and the neo-Nazis were unable to make any headway within the conservative community at large – in sharp contrast to the influence lunatic black anti-Semites were achieving in the black community.

But then came Joseph Sobran and Patrick J. Buchanan, both of whom began publishing anti-Semitic pieces a few years ago, while, exactly like their counterparts on the left, responding with indignant denials when they were called anti-Semitic. Now, to a considerable extent, the way Sobran and Buchanan were treated by the conservative community vindicated my belief that the right would no longer tolerate anti-Semitism among its own. Though Sobran was not fired from his position as an editor of *National Review*, he was publicly chastised by his then-boss, William F. Buckley, Jr., for writing columns that might reasonably be taken as anti-Semitic, and he was forbidden to write on Jewish subjects in the magazine (he did continue, however, to extrude anti-Semitic diatribes from time to time in his syndicated column). Buchanan was also chastised by Buckley for having made statements that – in Buckley's own words – amounted to anti-Semitism.

So far so good. (Incidentally, when Buckley, one of the leaders of the conservative community, was condemning Pat Buchanan for writing things that might reasonably be taken as anti-Semitic, some on the soft left such as Michael Kinsley were defending Buchanan against the charges of anti-Semitism. It's an interesting wrinkle.) Yet having agreed that Buchanan had made anti-Semitic statements, Buckley nevertheless went on to endorse him "for tactical reasons" when Buchanan challenged George Bush in the New Hampshire Republican primary. In other words, being anti-Semitic was not in itself enough to rule Buchanan out as a candidate for political office, any more than a book by Gore Vidal containing a blatantly anti-Semitic essay was enough to rule it out as a candidate for a literary prize. And while Sobran has by now disappeared into the loony right, Buchanan is still very much an accepted presence in the respectable journalistic world. So the right has not, after all, achieved zero tolerance for anti-Semitism, though all things considered, I still think that in recent years the record of the right has been better than the record of the left in resisting and containing and quarantining anti-Semitism within its own precincts.

But the question arises: does any of this matter? After all, the fears some of us had that the institution of quotas would lead to discrimination against Jews have not been realized, in spite of the fact that the resurgence of anti-Semitic ideas might well have served to rationalize

such a development as serving the interests of social justice. Jews in America remain a prosperous group, heavily represented in all the upper reaches of our society, including government. And as Irving Kristol recently said, Gentiles nowadays are so busy marrying Jews that they have no time to persecute them. So what, really, is there to worry about?

Well, for one thing, the spread of anti-Semitism among blacks has already led to what can, without too large a stretch, be called a pogrom – and in New York yet. This does not, of course, mean that Chmielnicki, let alone Auschwitz, is around the American corner. On the contrary, I for one find it hard to imagine that any such horrors could ever happen in America. I cling to the view, discredited in some circles, known as American exceptionalism, at least on the Jewish issue. But the truth is that neither I nor anyone else knows what may follow when the poisons of anti-Semitism begin spewing freely into the air. All we know for certain is what followed in the past. And what followed in the past ranged from discrimination to mass murder. Surely, then, no Jew with a sense of the history through which his people have lived has any business being complacent in the face of a resurgent anti-Semitism.

What we – and here I am talking not just about Jews but all decent people – need to do is recognize anti-Semitism when it rears its ugly head, call it by its proper name, refuse to accept justifications or excuses for it, and work to make it as disreputable again as it was for a season not so very long ago. I doubt that much more than that can be done. But even that much would represent a great advance over the confusion, the timidity, the passivity, the apologetics, and the cowardly acquiescence that have characterized much of the response to the reappearance of anti-Semitism in this country in the past twenty-five years and that have permitted it to spread and grow.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you, Norman. Now we'll hear from Robert Wistrich.

Robert Wistrich: Good morning. I am coming at this subject, I suspect, from a very different angle than Norman Podhoretz, probably because my own background is European and, more recently, Middle Eastern. I think that the varieties of anti-Semitism I've had to deal with, both as an historian and as someone who comments on current events, have been of a rather more serious and virulent nature than those which exist in the United States, both in the past and in the present. I want, in a very telegraphic way, to suggest or to attempt to provide some reasons as to why anti-Semitism has been and continues still to be a powerful force in the contemporary world. Let us remind ourselves of a few basic facts about what I choose to call "The Longest Hatred," and which I

do believe is the longest-existing form of group prejudice, which has shown an astonishing persistence, tenacity, and ability to adapt itself to new circumstances.

Jews have had a special position in what we call, generally, Western culture, or European civilization, certainly since the time of Christianity. Although one of the important changes that has taken place in the postwar world is the existence of a Jewish-Christian dialogue, we need to recall that for something like two thousand years, the dominant religious and cultural force in Christendom defined itself in certain important ways in terms of its own negation or supersession of Judaism. It was Christianity which decisively shaped a set of hostile attitudes towards what was called "the deicide people," the people of Christ-killers, allegedly responsible for the ultimate crime imaginable – the crucifixion of God himself. Jews represented in the minds of anti-Semitic and even many non-anti-Semitic Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox, the Old Covenant that had been superseded; they epitomized a stubborn refusal to recognize the Messiah who had already come; they were an obdurate, stiff-necked people. They were given the choice of either conversion or living in perpetual servitude; the humiliation of exile was the price for their blindness. The Church Fathers from the fourth century onwards created a theology of rejection which was never formally disclaimed until Vatican II in the 1960s. The consequences have been enormous. I believe, again to speak telegraphically, that to the extent that anti-Semitism became a more or less universal phenomenon and established such resonance within the larger culture, this resulted from the Christian background. The Jew in effect became, from the time of the Middle Ages, the personification of evil, the force that represented, or was in league with the devil, or the devil's legions. The Jew was the threatening antitype established by medieval Christianity, particularly by the Roman Catholic Church, though the Protestant Reformation did not initially improve matters much. Anyone familiar with the diatribes of Martin Luther would be aware of that.

So even without going into the history of the worst incidents of persecution during the period of dominance by the Christian churches, such as the Crusades or the Inquisition, or the impact of social segregation in ghettos, we need to be aware that anti-Semitism has a central place in Western civilization. This influence was not only theological in nature, but deeply entrenched in folklore, the visual arts, drama, and popular culture in general.

Here was the bedrock on which the modern ideology of anti-Semitism was constructed; through which new doctrines, new teachings, new ideologies could be grafted that belonged to a more secular and modern era. When we come to the period of the Enlightenment, which

was greeted by many Jews as a very hopeful and optimistic development, and which in many ways I think the United States more than any other country is built on (at least in a creedal sense), then in Europe, at least, it was certainly ambiguous with regard to the Jews. If we only think of the example of Voltaire, as one among many, we could say, to sum it up in a one-sentence formula: if in the past Jews had been persecuted because they were supposedly the *killers of God*, from the time of the Enlightenment and in the name of European rationalism or even humanism, they were to be denigrated and stigmatized as the *creators of the monotheistic God*, as being responsible for the barbarous “superstition” called revealed religion which the French *philosophes* wanted to eliminate.

By the nineteenth century, which is the time when anti-Semitism as a distinct ideology first emerges (although the phenomenon had clearly existed for two millennia), what we see is the secularization and politicization of a multilayered and well-embodied stereotypical structure that had originally grown out of a systematic theology and the spiritual domination of the Church. Therefore, despite the weakening influence of the Christian churches in modern secular society, many of the dominant stereotypes that had been developed over centuries persisted. They simply changed their mode of expression, their form and structure, becoming more worldly. But there was also something new that happened, which I think has important consequences to the present day. As the Jews emerged from the ghetto, they began in Europe to enjoy the fruits of emancipation, at least once they had entered into European society which had previously segregated and looked down upon them. Persecuted in the past, they were now free and equal citizens before the law, something that was not truly accepted in *social* reality and certainly not on an emotional level, by the majority of citizens in Europe.

Something else also happened. As the Jew assimilated into modern bourgeois society, he became a kind of symbol and metaphor for all those aspects of modernity which many declining groups in society rejected, resented, or were fearful of. To me, one of the most significant and important aspects of anti-Semitism, which exists from its inception, is precisely its power of symbolism: the Jew as metaphor, the Jew as an extraordinarily elastic abstraction. The persistence of anti-Semitism derives its force from this ability to separate certain attributes from the concrete living Jew, which are then applied in a universal way to all those phenomena which a particular individual, group, nation, or a whole culture does not like or cannot live with. The Jew then becomes a barometer and a touchstone for all those anonymous forces, especially in a “rootless” modern society which are loathed and rejected.

Another consequence of modernity which I think profoundly influenced anti-Semitism, and still does, is the constant breaking down of social barriers that had existed in the past – the physical barriers that had separated Jews from non-Jews by erecting ghetto walls led to a clear separation between Jews and Christians, a marking off of social, economic, and spiritual identities. In the modern world, you have an increasing blurring of notions of fixed identity. It seems to me that anti-Semitism during the past century has tried in a caricatured, distorted, and often hysterical manner to deal with real crises of personal or group identity. Certainly for the anti-Semite, whether the origin of his hatred be religious, cultural, political, or nationalist, it is the Jew as the Other who explains and reinforces the source of his own fragmented identity. That is often a psychological key to anti-Semitism.

Now, the racist discourse of anti-Semitism that assumed such immense proportions since the late nineteenth century derived in part from the need to establish a new demarcation line between Jews and non-Jews, to reinforce or replace the boundary that was in the process of erosion as a result of emancipation and assimilation. Precisely as Jews began to resemble the majority Gentile society more and more, as they adopted the dress, the customs, the language and culture of their hosts, as the visible signs of separation were dissolving, biological racism emerged as a new and ultimately much more dangerous way of reestablishing and refixing a disappearing set of boundaries. But now it was not faith but anatomy and a whole pseudoscience based on biology and racial myths that determined the new lines of division.

Then there is the *political* aspect. If we are concerned with anti-Semitism in the first instance, it is because we are well aware of its danger as a murderous and even genocidal political phenomenon. On the other hand, Jews have often lived in societies with certain levels of anti-Semitism that they have been able to tolerate: this is the kind of anti-Semitism which is essentially no different from xenophobic forms of prejudice that exist in all societies, an almost “normal” type of ethnocentrism. Realistically, such prejudice, whether now or in the future, is unlikely to disappear in its simple, straightforward form, nor do I think that is what essentially preoccupies Jews. They are not overly worried by the more benign forms of everyday social discrimination. But we know that even here, there is a danger. Along the spectrum that leads from that banal level of prejudice with which Jews can live relatively easily, to the ultimate horrors of the Shoah, there are many intermediate stages, each with their own characteristics. The politicization of anti-Semitism, it should be remembered, was a fairly recent development: it has existed for about a hundred and twenty years. I think that it derived partly from

the rise of modern nationalism, from the crisis of the modern nation-state and from the democratization of semi-feudal societies where the traditional elites, along with many disgruntled and discontented social strata, were unable to cope with the impact of rapid capitalist modernization. These factors led to the development of movements that officially have called themselves anti-Semitic, at least since the late 1870s.

It is true that today, as Norman Podhoretz pointed out, anti-Semites are much more reluctant to openly label themselves (as they did then or even fifty years ago) as anti-Semitic. But we know that many of the slogans and catchwords used by contemporary populist or semi-fascist movements which are growing both in the Western and Eastern parts of Europe, as well as much of the agitation and propaganda directed against Israel, uses a code language that is historically related to anti-Semitism. The politicization of anti-Semitism has also been so disconcerting because of another feature that unfortunately characterizes the twentieth century as a whole – and this is arguably the most lethal of all forms of anti-Semitism – namely the propensity of large numbers of people to believe in conspiracy theories. It appears to me there is no other ideology more suited to the development of conspiracy theories of history, society and politics, than that of anti-Semitism. The notion of the *hidden* enemy, the idea that Jews secretly plot and organize behind the scenes in a far-reaching design to achieve domination and power – this has proven to be, contrary to all common sense, one of the most seductive and powerful myths of the twentieth century. The extraordinarily protean character of the Jew, who can be made to fit so many different roles all at once, who can be designated both as the Communist agitator or as the arch-capitalist, as the imperialist agent or as the revolutionary subversive, as the secularizing agent of modernity or as the symbol of reactionary orthodox fanaticism, is an ideal scapegoat for paranoid politics. During the twentieth century, unfortunately, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories developed into a *total ideology*. Hence, political anti-Semitism became so lethal and capable of leading to mass murder. After the First World War, anti-Semitism became a vision of the world, or as the Nazis liked to call it, a *Weltanschauung*.

Not only the Nazis developed anti-Semitism in this extreme form. Equally, we should not forget that since the Second World War, conspiracy theories in slightly different variations have also served other totalitarian ideologies and movements, such as Soviet Communism and fundamentalist Islam, to name just two examples. Moreover, if we consider the very disturbing revival of ethnic nationalism today, a kind of 1990s version of *Blut und Boden*, which has already led (in a non-Jewish context) to an ethnic cleansing, recalling some of the worst phenomena

of the twentieth century, then we see that the Nazi legacy is by no means exhausted.

Jews are certainly not the only victims, but they have been singled out in a peculiar way, I believe, in modern conspiracy theories. They have been consistently mythologized to a degree that no other group has had to experience. It is the combination of a conspiratorial and even apocalyptic view of politics (with so many mystical and irrational elements deeply imbedded in it) with a very calculated, demagogic, modern mass politics, which helped anti-Semitism become extraordinarily virulent in this century. The Jews were the lightning rod to explain to masses of disoriented people the slaughter during the First World War, the humiliating defeat of Germany, the iniquities of capitalism, the ruthless triumph of Communism in the Soviet Union, the demise of Christianity, the decline of Islam, and an endless list of economic catastrophes, disasters and tragedies which have been laid at the door of mysterious Jewish conspirators. This is not the kind of anti-Semitism that you can easily deal with at the level of rational argument, logic or education. It is not subject to empirical proof or demonstration. As a British political journalist once put it, this is "irrationality distilled to infinity." Against that there are no simple answers.

If we come to the question of Zionism and Israel, which is one of the issues on the agenda of this symposium, we have a very good illustration of the way anti-Semitism works on the contemporary scene, and how it can adapt itself to a new set of circumstances. To a striking degree, the international Jewish conspiracy that figured so powerfully in the prewar period found a new source of life with the existence of the State of Israel. For anti-Semites, the Jewish State was *not* a democratic state fighting for its existence and survival in the Middle East, *not* the product of a national liberation movement of the Jewish people, *not* an effort to achieve a minimal basis for a sovereign Jewish existence, but rather the geopolitical center of a sinister design to take over the world. For many other, less paranoid, critics, it was at best the handmaiden and instrument of the prime forces of evil in the world, beginning with American imperialism. The little State of Israel in the short period of its independent existence has become, in a unique way, the target of one of the most extraordinary pieces of political mythology that we have seen since the Second World War. Beginning with the notion that this tiny state was a powerful enemy threatening the existence not only of the large Arab world or of Islam as a whole or great entities like the Soviet empire in its heyday, many of the attributes that were assigned to world Jewry were simply transferred, with a slight change of vocabulary, to international Zionism and the Israeli conspiracy. This worked to great

effect in the United Nations, at least until very recently: a quite extraordinary and disproportionate amount of time was taken up with the ritual condemnations of Israel, depicted by its enemies as if it were the world's leading violator of universal human rights!

So what we see here is something that transcends simplistic social and economic explanations, although clearly external conditions influence the direction in which anti-Semites or anti-Semitic ideologies move in a given period. It is as if there were some kind of fatality in the continuity and longevity of a tradition that was established in antiquity, developed through the Christian Middle Ages, but has long since transcended that particular framework, carrying on vigorously until the present day. The Jew in this anti-Semitic tradition has assumed an infinite number of masks, but continues to be seen as the source of all the disasters that befall mankind. This kind of "cosmic" anti-Semitism, it seems to me, is what needs to concern us most, though perhaps we still lack the analytical tools to plumb the depths of the collective psychopathology it reveals. Curiously enough, psychoanalysis, which has helped us to uncover some of the keys to understanding the irrational, has thus far not contributed as much as one might have hoped to the elucidation of this phenomenon.

In conclusion I would say that anti-Semitism is still very much a presence and has not been superseded by other ethnic conflicts, expressions of racism, or new targets of intolerance, as we are so often being told. Fortunately, indeed, Jews are not as much in the front line as they were fifty years ago. But this does not mean that the myth of the Jew as an archetypal stranger, as the symbol *par excellence* of cosmopolitanism, mobile internationalism, and occult forms of power has faded or that Jewish communities – even in the United States – are not immune to new epidemics of anti-Semitism. All the facile talk about the imminent demise of anti-Semitism is wishful thinking. Fifty years ago, Jean-Paul Sartre defined anti-Semitism as reflecting a deep fear of the human condition. This existential reality is still very much with us, and I doubt very much we can look forward to its disappearance in the twenty-first century. Thank you.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much. Now first, I'd like to give Norman Podhoretz a chance to respond or comment if he'd like, then we'll open to questions.

Norman Podhoretz: Well, I agree with not only every word but every syllable of that extremely skillful and illuminating *tour d'horizon*. I would only add one small point on the question Robert Wistrich raised

about the translation of the conspiracy theory and the adaptation of its categories to the State of Israel – what I myself referred to in my talk as the taking of ideas that had been directed against Jews in the Diaspora and transposing them to the Jewish State among the nations. It isn't merely – I don't think we're ready to use the past tense here – it isn't merely that Israel is now seen as the center of a vast conspiracy to take over the world in conjunction with other forces; it's that Israel's existence and policies were treated in the UN and elsewhere in a way that was strongly reminiscent, to anyone with ears to hear and eyes to see, of the way that Jews and Jewish communities were talked about by anti-Semites in the Diaspora.

In other words, all the supposedly characteristic vices of Jews were now translated into the language of international politics and applied to Israel. Jews had been attacked by anti-Semites for being greedy, clannish; Israel was seen to be aggressive, grasping – in other words, greedy – and clannish, in the sense of the Zionism-is-racism libel. This meant that when Israel behaved as any other nation was expected to behave, in ways that were taken for granted in the case of other nations – that is, asserting a right to self-defense, or trying to look after its own – it was attacked just as Jews in the Diaspora had always been attacked, for exhibiting what is after all a universal human trait. A trait, moreover, that is regarded as a virtue in other peoples. This double standard, this tendency to put anything Jews do in the worst and harshest possible light, has been behind a good deal of the anti-Israel propaganda that still circulates in the universities and much of the media, and in other such forums.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Now to the questions. You may also address last night's speakers, who are in the audience.

Question: Can an anti-Semite be converted into a non-anti-Semite?

Robert Wistrich: I don't know of any studies on this question, and therefore we have no research on it. From my experience, I admit to being, on a personal level, a great believer in persuasion. But I must add that, on this issue, I'm a skeptic, if you're talking about a serious anti-Semite, somebody of the type I was characterizing earlier. If we're talking about a more trivial level of hostility, then I assume that as with other forms of fairly banal prejudice, it may be accessible to some kind of reasoned argument.

Question: Do other groups invent us to hate?

Robert Wistrich: Well, that's a bit simplistic. However, anti-Semites themselves have often been very conscious of the "providential" character, from their point of view, of the existence of the Jews. There's a very striking remark made by the founder of the Action Française, Charles Maurras, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. He emphasized how conveniently, not to say miraculously, anti-Semitism permitted the reconciling of many contradictions within the ideology and policy of the integral nationalists. I think this is also true of other groups, that anti-Semitism provides this ideological cement with which you can bridge so many contradictory doctrines and economic interests. It has nothing really to do with empirical Jews or the way that Jews actually behave, because anti-Semitism always assumes that Jews act in a monolithic manner; that whatever differences exist among Jews (and *we* know they are serious enough), they are merely the outward mask to deceive Gentiles. They are unimportant, because at the end of the day, "The Jew," in his quasi-metaphysical, abstract form, exists as a principle of evil. So the real Jews are often of secondary importance.

With regard to genetics, I certainly don't believe in that, but there was at least one interesting theory that attempted to argue something like this. It was put forward by the early Zionist thinker Leon Pinsker, who suggested that anti-Semitism was a kind of atavistic, transmitted *hereditary* trait, which he believed existed in the non-Jewish world, in the same way that a fear of ghosts still exists: I think that was the parallel he drew in *Auto-emancipation*.

Let me also tell you an anecdote. About three years ago I interviewed in Moscow a man who was a former head of the Soviet intelligence apparatus in the Western world, and we had a discussion about the way the KGB viewed anti-Semitism. He felt he could speak freely because he's no longer part of the apparatus. At one point he surprised me by quoting Winston Churchill out of the blue, after I had asked him, "Why do you think that among the Russian people there seems to be again this revival of anti-Semitism?" He said, "It's very simple. Winston Churchill once explained why the British were not as anti-Semitic as most European nations, and Churchill's explanation was that the British have a superiority complex: they just don't believe anybody is as good as they are. Therefore, why should they hate the Jews? Whereas we Russians," he said in a moment of astonishing frankness, "we are convinced deep down that we are inferior to everybody else, and therefore we have to hate the Jews."

Question: The question I have is for Mr. Bellow: Does the nature of Christianity not imply two thousand years of racism, in that from the

Ten Commandments to the Beatitudes, or as Christians like to say, “the higher law,” there is the implication that Judaism is a precursor to something superior?

Saul Bellow: Let me say first of all that I don’t speak as an expert; I’m only a novelist. Novelists are fairly observant, shrewd people but they don’t have much theoretical foundation, don’t care much about theoretical foundation. What I said yesterday was that Jew-hatred had become what I referred to as an *egregore*. It’s very like the term *myth*, used by Mr. Wistrich. But what I intended to say is that it had entered the unconscious, so to speak, that it had become an inherited and almost instinctive property and that it was a delusion. Of course Christianity has a great deal to do with the organization and the spread of this. I’m no scholar, but I have read enough to understand that when the Gospels were written in Greek, under Greek influence, anywhere from sixty to two hundred years after the death of Christ, they reflected already an attempt to wrest a religion from the hands of the Jews and appropriate it for very different objectives and very different views. So it’s quite clear that for a long time Christianity was the principal agency for spreading Jew-hatred. I don’t like the term “anti-Semitism” because I don’t like the term “Semitism,” which is a German invention of the nineteenth century by a certain journalist to shift the emphasis of Jew-hatred from religion and to give it a secular foundation.

Question: I attended last night’s meeting, Mr. Bellow, and heard the questions put to you regarding current black anti-Semitism, or Jew-hatred. I got a strong feeling that you really felt uncomfortable handling that question, that you wanted to duck it and hide. I felt that was the wrong way to handle it. Am I incorrect in my attitudes?

Saul Bellow: No, I wasn’t trying to duck or hide anything. All I said was that owing to certain developments in the mental life of the country – I won’t call it the intellectual life of the country – it had become very, very difficult to discuss these questions publicly at all, and that there was a taboo imposed upon free discussion, which I consider to be a very dangerous thing. This taboo was extended by the newspapers and the other media, by universities and by all kinds of pressures. So there is not even a proper language for the discussion of these questions. What it means is that free speech is being limited to the politically correct. This is a real danger in a democratic society, because when you have what we call free speech without debate, you have the beginning of demagoguery, and we’re experiencing that demagoguery right now. I’ve had enough

contact with it, I've been sufficiently exposed to it, to be very wary of what one says in a large public gathering. So I wasn't really avoiding the question. I gave instead an example by describing what had happened in Chicago when the rumor was begun from the City Hall itself, from the mayor's office, that Jewish doctors were infecting black children with AIDS. In telling what had happened when people tried to discuss this, I was already indicating a sort of answer to your question.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. I think, to put it somewhat bluntly, this is what has happened to many of us at universities, because when you start to open a discussion of these problems, you are frequently called racist, and then there's no answer.

Saul Bellow: Yes, that's it. I have already many times been described as a racist, and some of my books have been trashed because of this. I think I have some justification. Yes?

Question: Shutting up in the face of that is no answer, because it only gets worse, I think.

Saul Bellow: Well, I'm not exactly shutting up. I've gone public in many ways. I've recently published a piece in the *New York Times* op-ed page in which I pretty frankly stated some of my views. I don't know how much, I don't know how far a novelist can be turned into a crusader on a very significant public question. I try to avoid it. Yet I consider the trend toward the suppression of points of view deemed to be politically incorrect to be a very great danger. It's one of the reasons why I do occasionally emerge from the paralysis of a private life to say something.

Edith Kurzweil: Well, I would just add one more thing to your defense, and that is, read the novels.

Saul Bellow: Thank you, that's right.

Question: I have a less philosophical and more practical question: What can the American Jewish community do at this time to combat black anti-Semitism in its various forms, low and high? One thing that doesn't seem to be succeeding is the effort to persuade black political figures to stand up and attack Farrakhan and the others. I think, with the one exception of Major Owens, a very noble exception, the problem is that black politicians are afraid that if they attack Farrakhan, Farrakhan will

organize opposition to them at the ballot box. The only idea that I have heard that makes any sense is to try and influence black entertainers and black athletes to express disavowal of black anti-Semitism. This might be possible, because of the Jewish role especially in the entertainment industry. Now my question for Mr. Podhoretz is, what else could we be doing now, as a community, to fight black anti-Semitism?

Norman Podhoretz: To be fair, Major Owens was not the only black politician who condemned Farrakhan. There were also John Lewis and two or three others, though I would agree that the response in general was tepid, and in some cases, worse than tepid; it was, in effect, acquiescent. The head of the NAACP has actually met with Farrakhan, embraced him after rhetorically criticizing Khalid Muhammad's speech. Anybody who remembers the NAACP under Roy Wilkins must feel utterly bewildered to see what has become of that organization.

What to do? I am very much against the tactic of begging blacks to condemn expressions of black anti-Semitism. I think it's demeaning, lacking in self-respect. That might perhaps be a price worth paying if it worked, but it apparently does not work. In fact, all it has done lately is to elicit further attacks on the Jews for trying to bully blacks into making statements that blacks don't wish to make or that it is politically imprudent for them to make. I certainly wouldn't want to see pressure put by Jews in the entertainment industry or the sports world on, I don't know whom, Michael Jackson? Michael Jordan? For one thing, that would completely confirm some of the charges that Farrakhan has been making about the Jewish control of black entertainers and black sportswriters. It would not only not work, it would be counterproductive.

So what indeed is to be done? Saul Bellow is a novelist, and I am a critic, an editor, an analyst, an observer. I'm not very good at formulating programs of action. But watching the way the organized Jewish community has responded to black anti-Semitism since it came into visibility in 1967, I have come to the conclusion that certain things ought *not* to be done. I do not believe in the vaunted black-Jewish dialogue that a great many Jewish organizations keep yearning to reconstitute in the hope that this will somehow mollify or pacify the anti-Semites within the black community. They dream of restoring a black-Jewish political alliance at a time when the interests of the two groups have diverged to such an extent that it's hard to see a common basis for action. All these dialogues seem to accomplish is to mount spectacles of Jewish self-abasement. So I would like to see them cut off altogether. Anyhow, I don't see what there is to talk about. I have nothing to say to an anti-

Semite except “Up yours!” or “Shut up!” or “Drop dead!” or something similarly elegant. I should, however, say that I have known some anti-Semites who *have* been converted, though in the case of pathological anti-Semites, nothing is possible.

To repeat, my view is that the best thing to do is to keep calling anti-Semitism by its proper name and to keep condemning it. That sounds self-evident, but the fact is that very few people and very few organizations have actually done that in the past twenty-five years. If you look at the history of responses to explosions of anti-Semitism among blacks, you will find many more apologetics, justifications, and denials than strong condemnations. So I think that condemning these statements and trying to isolate the people who make them, instead of lionizing them, as has so often been done, might help. And it would certainly be better for intellectual hygiene and for Jewish self-respect if Jews behaved in that way instead of constantly begging blacks to help them out in this area.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Harry Kahn?

Harry Kahn: Just a comment on the NAACP and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Many people confuse this organization with the NAACP. The Legal Defense Fund was begun in the Thurgood Marshall days and it was a part of the NAACP, but later the NAACP actually sued the Legal Defense Fund for using its name. The NAACP had Senator Brooke as their lawyer; he lost. The Legal Defense Fund is a separate organization which has been against anti-Semitism and has spoken out against it. Jack Greenberg was the executive director for twenty-four years, and they built up respect in many intellectual segments of the black community. They are speaking out. Elaine Jones, the new executive director, is speaking with the Anti-Defamation League, and this area of promise, I think, should be encouraged and helped. Many people confuse the two organizations and refuse to give any more money now to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund for their fight. That I think is a mistake; I think it should be supported and helped.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you.

Question: My question is for Robert Wistrich. It’s difficult to ask you a question, in fact, since you yourself have so beautifully and dauntingly raised so many issues. You said, if I understood you, that in going through the history, briefly, after the “God-reasons” more or less went away, in the advent of modernity, the Jew became an abstraction, and

remains an abstraction in the protean form of abstractness even through the establishment of the State of Israel. Could you expand a bit on the idea of abstractness and what is it about us Jews that makes us so abstractable even though we feel ourselves to be so specifically there?

Robert Wistrich: Well, you've raised the question of the peculiarly abstract, manipulable and protean quality of the Jews, and you also point to the paradox that this is a people that is so concretely particular, having, I would add, such a sharply defined identity of its own. Is there anything in the Jewish people that lends itself to this kind of mythologized anti-Semitism? I suspect it is partly connected with the prolonged and uniquely diasporic experience of the Jews as a people in exile: *a people without soil, territory, or the normal attributes of power*, yet being able not just to survive, but to make such a difference, to actually be a determining factor in certain key turning points in the history of civilization. This is something inherently difficult to grasp or accept for anybody, and especially, I suspect, for non-Jews not familiar with the internal Jewish self-understanding. It can be a very disorienting notion. Maybe, then, the level of abstraction that is often found in anti-Semitism is an attempt, however inadequate, to somehow grapple with the strangeness of the Jewish diasporic existence, but that's only one aspect.

I think when you go back to the historical base of the theology of rejection that I was speaking about earlier, you really do find the seeds of the problem. Actually, you could go back beyond the Church Fathers to the New Testament itself; just look at the Gospel of John, for instance. Already there, "the Jews" exist as a malevolent force seeking the death of Jesus – they are in fact portrayed as the children of Satan. They are not the sons of Abraham, but they are the sons of the devil. They are already taken out of their concrete setting, stripped as it were of their humanity. This was a theological necessity for a religion that comes out of the matrix of Judaism and seeks to negate it. Christianity had to establish its claim as the "new Israel" by rejecting the *raison d'être*, the autonomous identity of the Jews and of Judaism. This required reducing the Jewish people and its historical continuity to an abstraction, turning them into the expression of a negative, even a Satanic principle. This was historically the root of anti-Semitism, even if since then, the abstract myth of the Jew has acquired many new forms.

Beyond that, another point occurs to me concerning modern totalitarian ideologies, and this extends beyond the Jewish case. Ask yourself why, for example, the kulaks were exterminated in Soviet Russia in the 1930s? Think of the gap between the "real" sociological

phenomenon represented by the kulaks and the role of an internal class “enemy” justifying the extinction of millions of people in order to make way for the classless society. Here, too, you have a level of ideological abstraction which is one of the most frightening aspects of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

Norman Podhoretz: Here you’ve finally said something I disagree with. I think anti-Semitism is, strictly speaking, more irrational than the massacre of the kulaks. There was a revolutionary theory behind that massacre, an utterly ruthless and hideous theory, similar to the one that led to the genocide in Cambodia. The idea was that unless you got rid of this class you couldn’t build a new system. So there was some “rational” basis for eliminating the kulaks. By contrast, it’s very difficult, if indeed possible at all, to find anything comparably “rational” in the case of anti-Semitism. When Hitler embarked on his program of genocide, the Jews, represented by him as a tremendously powerful threat that had to be eliminated, were so far from being powerful that they were unable to prevent a third of their people from being massacred with ease. And it was irrational, as Hannah Arendt pointed out long ago, for Hitler to divert transport in 1944 that was badly needed for the war effort, in order to deport the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The idea that the helpless Hungarian Jews were a greater threat to Germany than the armies against which it was fighting was crazy.

Question: Mr. Podhoretz, just as you said that it is incumbent upon Jews to criticize black anti-Semitism, isn’t it also incumbent upon Jews and upon all progressive people to condemn white racism also?

Norman Podhoretz: Well, I’m not a progressive person, so I’m not sure if I can answer your question. The subject of this particular panel is anti-Semitism, and I notice that when anyone tries to talk about anti-Semitism or to condemn anti-Semitism, instantly other forms of bigotry or hatred are brought in to keep it company, as though the focus on Jew-hatred – I think Saul Bellow is right to insist on that way of describing this phenomenon – somehow isn’t enough by itself, and needs to be broadened to include other things in order to be made respectable. I want to talk, now, about anti-Semitism and not about other forms of hatred, each of which is a different kind of problem. I don’t think you can usefully dump them all into a single pot called bigotry or racism.

Question: If anti-Semitism is here to stay, what can we do about self-

bashing Jews – people who take too much blame even where there is none to be assigned? I’ve seen that especially in this country. I’m a Sephardic Jew, and I was disturbed by the overreaction, for example, to the Baruch Goldstein incident, when yeshiva students thought it necessary to take a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, saying that they did not support Baruch Goldstein.

Robert Wistrich: I think Norman Podhoretz made his position very clear on that issue, and basically I have the same gut feelings. For instance, two months ago, the Council of Europe had a seminar in which I participated, entitled “Europe Against Intolerance,” at which anti-Semitism was grouped along with racism, xenophobia, and other nasty things. It was remarkable how many Jewish speakers there prefaced their remarks by denouncing the massacre in Hebron, as if somehow this lent a greater credibility or authenticity to their comments about racism or anti-Semitism. This struck me as exaggerated. I view this perhaps with a little more understanding or tolerance as an unfortunate symptom of a long Jewish experience of having to weigh every word carefully while looking over one’s shoulder; this phenomenon of the “trembling Israelite,” excessively fearful of what the Gentiles may think, has good historical reasons, but I hope it will pass.

Question: Would you say there’s a subtle form of Jew-hatred or anti-Semitism, and of conspiracy theory, in this generalized belief among others that Jews somehow have an intellectual supremacy, that they are expected to do more and better than others? That Jewish intellectual ability or superiority may be used not only for advancing the world generally, but dominating it?

Robert Wistrich: In other words, you seem to be asking whether or not anti-Semitism is a response at some level to the perceived intellectual superiority of Jews which might give them domination. There’s no doubt in my mind, just from reading anti-Semitic literature of all kinds, from different times and places, that there *is* a deep-seated fear of Jewish intellectual capacity. It’s interesting, too, that many of the more significant anti-Semites in history have never denied this. They may argue, of course, about the place that should be assigned to the intellect in the hierarchy of values. Certainly in the case of Hitler and the Nazi party, it was very clear that it was to be assigned a very low place indeed, and this was another good reason for wiping out the Jews. But I do recognize the implication behind your question. Anti-Semitism takes certain material forms, because from the period of emancipation onwards, as

Jews tended to enter the free professions where the exercise of intellect was important, they did indeed excel. Everyone knows what an astonishing contribution Jews have made to the culture and science of the twentieth century. This could only exacerbate those feelings of envy, fear, and resentment at what is sometimes called Jewish intellectual preeminence. However, before we get carried away with this flattering notion, I think we should remember that there are also very stupid Jews.

Question: Perhaps it's an oversimplification, but it would seem to me that this is played out particularly in black-Jewish relations. What if the "do unto others" concept were applied as "how would the blacks like it if we took everything they said and turned it around?"

Norman Podhoretz: You mean, if you said to Farrakhan, how would you like it if we said nasty things about you? I think he'd laugh at you. He says that Jews continue to be racist and that we've never stopped, that we are incorrigibly racist, that the Jews are still to this day oppressing blacks, manipulating them. . . .

Question: How would blacks like it if we, as Jews, would say to Mr. Farrakhan, "Blacks are blah, blah, blah, whatever . . ."?

Norman Podhoretz: If we said whatever bad things we can think of about blacks? Well, somehow I don't think that tactic would work. After all, Farrakhan is not a case of misunderstanding or lack of inter-group sensitivity. In him you're dealing with someone who I believe is swayed both by ideological conviction and political opportunism: it's a lethal combination. And far from suffering from having been openly anti-Semitic, Farrakhan has prospered as a result of it, so I doubt he would be reachable by such appeals.

Question: Why is Farrakhan allowed to say the things he does, to say that Jews are bloodsuckers of the black people, isn't that inciting to murder, to riot, to assault? Why is Khalid Muhammad allowed to say how wonderful killing white people is? That's inciting blacks to kill whites and Jews. Why does our system allow that?

Edith Kurzweil: You mean why is all of that allowed legally? I don't think we have legal experts here, but maybe Norman Podhoretz could respond.

Norman Podhoretz: My guess is that if you attempted to bring such

an action in the courts, where there is a strong commitment to the First Amendment, you'd lose. I'm also leery of that kind of tactic myself because of its chilling effect on speech.

Question: Why do they have the right to assert what is "wrong" with the Jews?

Norman Podhoretz: Well, presumably we all have the right to say just about anything in this country, which sometimes becomes extremely uncomfortable. That's a price many people are willing to pay and others are not so willing to pay, depending on whose ox is being gored.

Question: How do you feel about the anti-Semitism of President Nixon, and also about President Reagan's visit to Bitburg?

Norman Podhoretz: Nixon's anti-Semitism was, so far as I know, privately expressed in the form of cracks about Jews to his intimates. He was not in any public sense, or any political sense, an anti-Semite, and in fact Rabin himself said, on the occasion of Nixon's death, that Nixon had been a very strong supporter and friend of Israel. To me, incidentally, as I've often written, attitudes toward Israel have been the single most important touchstone of attitudes toward Jews in general, in the last twenty-five years or so. I don't see how anyone who supports Israel can be considered anti-Semitic.

I condemned Reagan's visit to Bitburg, and I thought it was a very bad thing for him to have done, but I know of no evidence whatever that Reagan was or is anti-Semitic even to the extent that Nixon was. As far as I know, nobody has accused Reagan even of making cracks about Jews in private. I think the Bitburg visit was a highly ill-advised action he took in order to help Chancellor Kohl of Germany through an electoral crisis. I don't think he should have done it, and I gather that he himself regretted having done it.

I once had a public debate in print with Bill Buckley on the issue of Sobran and Buchanan. Buckley got angry because at one point in this debate I said that Sobran and Buchanan were anti-Semites. Although he was willing to condemn what they had written as anti-Semitic, he objected to calling them anti-Semites. Sobran, he argued, was not an anti-Semite: through carelessness, or stupidity, or whatever, he had written bad things, but in fact he was not an anti-Semite in his heart. My answer was that I had no way of probing the human heart; all I could do was judge the man's words and judge him by those words.

I think that is a good guideline in these discussions. That is, we need

not try to read the minds of other people or worry about what may be buried in their hearts. What we should pay attention to is public statement and public action. And if someone like Richard Nixon privately entertains certain kinds of feelings about Jews – well, in a sense, it's none of my business unless, in effect, he goes public. I knew Gore Vidal for twenty-five or thirty years, and I knew that he had certain quirky feelings about Jews, but it never became a real issue between us; in fact, it was something we joked about in private. But when he went public with these ugly sentiments, then it was another matter. I think that's the key. There is a distinction between the private and the public.

Question: It seems a distinction has got to be made between combating people like Leonard Jeffries and Tony Martin and Louis Farrakhan, and dealing with the underlying problem of general feeling of Jew-hatred among a vast number of blacks. The media had a recent poll showing that while anti-Semitism in general has been on the decline during the last ten years, black anti-Semitism has been on the increase, and they gave various explanations for the results. It seems to me that simply being aggressive and combative is not going to work with the general group of blacks. Something must be done, and it seems to me that some kind of a media or public relations or advertising campaign ought to be undertaken in order to persuade these people that they are reacting to a fantasy, not to what Jews are really like.

Norman Podhoretz: You raise an interesting question. Among blacks anti-Semitism appears to rise with the level of education, which is the opposite of the case among whites, or at least it used to be. I don't know if the next generation of whites going through today's universities will come out less prejudiced, as was the case in the past. It used to be thought that the answer to anti-Semitism was education. But it turns out that in the case of blacks at least, education has increased anti-Semitism, not decreased it. There's a very good reason for this, which is that a lot of the colleges and universities, particularly the Afro-American studies departments, have become hotbeds of anti-Semitic demagogues like Jeffries and Martin and others, so that exposing kids to the influence of those people is what spreads the problem. In addition, there is the increasing influence of demagogues like Farrakhan outside the universities. As Arch Puddington has pointed out in an article in *Commentary*, it's hard to think of another public figure in the United States today who could draw a crowd of about 30,000 for a speech in New York, as Farrakhan recently did. When Muhammad went to Howard University he drew a crowd of around two thousand. How many people are here

today? Two hundred?

So I think we have a case here of trickle-down. Black anti-Semitism used to be blamed on the Jewish storekeeper in the ghetto, or the Jewish landlord. In my opinion that was a mistake, but in any event there are no more Jewish storekeepers or Jewish landlords. Now there are Koreans, and of course they have a tough time with blacks too. I myself think that the ideas and the influence of the so-called leaders, the demagogues, are the source of the problem, and that's why the best way to deal with it is to deal with them.

Robert Wistrich: So far, I have refrained from intervening in the "internal affairs" of the American Jewish community and its problems with the black community. But from the available evidence, including the American Jewish Committee studies which I've seen, it strikes me that in certain important areas, although black anti-Semitism does appear to have grown and does seem to be more significant than in the white community, this is not true across the board. There are still areas which particularly concern vital black interests, such as the prevention of an escalation in white racism or in official discrimination that would be directed against them, where they seem to perceive that they have some common interest with Jews.

However much the old alliance is frayed – whether it actually was an alliance or not, I'm not even so sure – but despite the deterioration in the relationship, there is, I would suspect, a feeling in the black community that if they were again to be openly victimized by the white majority, the Jews would be important allies for them. Therefore they would not necessarily favor any outright discrimination against Jews. What I see here is more of a pseudo-intellectual anti-Semitism that has grown up among a sector of the black community. This could be dangerous, I think, because we often tend to underestimate the long-term impact of ideas and of ideology. The fact that it has taken the form of black radicalism, separatist black nationalism or the Nation of Islam puts it in line with certain patterns outside of the United States: I think it may be a good thing that both Jews and non-Jews in the United States are aware that black-Jewish hostility does not exist in complete isolation as a purely American problem, that there are some facets of it which can be understood in terms of the history of anti-Semitism. But it may not be such a pervasive phenomenon as to justify describing black anti-Semitism as having increased across the whole spectrum. I'm not at all sure that out there on the streets you could demonstrate that there is a larger group of black people today who have deep-rooted prejudices against Jews. But the overall climate has surely changed, for the worse.

Edith Kurzweil: I think, however, that we cannot really assume that there is one “black community.” If we do, we are ignoring important differences. And we are accepting that the rabble-rousers are speaking for all blacks. We ought to find the groups you’re speaking of, and support them in some way.

Question: I’d like to support Mr. Wistrich. I am a doctor, and my practice is mostly geriatric. Sixty to seventy percent of my patients are black. I find them loving, caring, gentle. I have a good relationship with every single one of them. They are wonderful in their relationships with their families, their lovingness with their children, and they support their families. I am not surprised by this, but it completely contradicts so many of the impressions we get. What you said is entirely right. There are great segments of our black friends and allies and fellow citizens who I am sure feel very warmly inclined towards Jews.

Edith Kurzweil: That’s right, but they suffer within their communities for it.

Question: To say in general that it is the black intellectuals who are encouraging these racist expressions is to miss the point. The black anti-Semitic agitation has its origins in a black power movement being led by a group of Black Muslims represented by Farrakhan. Only counterfeit intellectuals would want to be the rallying point of that angry mass of unemployed, imprisoned youths attracted by this particular movement. It is not an intellectual movement; it’s a black power movement, and it’s guided by those few black pseudo-intellectuals on the college campuses who rally around the Farrakhan army.

Norman Podhoretz: I don’t think there are so few. What is extraordinary about what’s been happening in the last few years is the extent to which Farrakhan and some of these others have been able to get a hearing and support outside their own organizations. What is the membership of the Nation of Islam, between ten and fifteen thousand? It’s not very large. Yet, as I just pointed out, Farrakhan was able to draw thirty thousand people for a speech in New York. And in a recent poll conducted by the Black Politics Study at the University of Chicago, nearly seventy percent of the black respondents said he was a positive force. Now some of the respondents, no doubt, mean that he fights drugs and that he is for law and order. Nevertheless, to go back to what I was saying about the toleration of anti-Semitism in all circles of society, the

fact that he's anti-Semitic doesn't seem to disqualify him from that kind of admiration among a huge percentage of blacks. So I don't think it's right to say that the problem is confined to a tiny segment of Muslims.

Rabbi David Woznicka: Three quick points. It might be helpful in dealing with anti-Semitism to articulate why it should be of interest to the rest of the world. In *Why the Jews; The Reason for Antisemitism*, Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin suggest that the Jews are the miner's canary of the world. Miners are concerned about poisonous fumes in the mines, so they take a canary with them. Since canaries are more sensitive to these fumes than people, if the canary dies, the miners know to get out of the mine. All too often this has been the history of the Jews. They may be the first to suffer, but they are rarely the last. In Iran, soon after he took power, Khomeini took over the Israeli embassy. We know what followed. In Uganda, Idi Amin's stated hatred of Israel was only a forerunner to his slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Ugandans. It is important that the rest of the world understand that it is in their best interest to stop anti-Semites, because while the Jews may be the first victims, they will not be the only ones.

My second point has to do with the college campus and the issue of tenure. Most of us who say things that are clearly without substantiation will be called to task, and if it is an important enough issue, or done frequently enough, ultimately our job may be at risk. And while a tenured professor can be challenged by others in the academic community, and risk his or her respect in that community, it appears that in some cases, outrageous and unsubstantiated claims can be made apparently without risk to one's job. We are all aware that there are a few professors who continually make such claims against the Jews. Do you believe tenure may play a role in the disproportionate anti-Semitism that we see on the campus?

Finally, I am concerned should some conclude that Jews are hated for psychological reasons. To say the Nazis were sick is to no longer hold them responsible for their actions. Nazis were evil. They committed evil acts. When people commit evil, we should confront it and call it evil.

Norman Podhoretz: I agree entirely with your last point, and when I said that the Nazis were irrational in their anti-Semitic policy, I did not mean that they were sick. I don't think they were sick. I think they were indeed evil, and it's very important to maintain that sense of things. As for the question of free speech on the campuses: Leonard Jeffries, after being fired, was reinstated when the court ruled that in fact he had been

fired because of things he said, and that therefore his First Amendment rights had been violated. I had never myself before known that there was a First Amendment right to be the chairman of a department at a college, but apparently that is what the high court of New York State decided.

Edith Kurzweil: I think it had to do with legal technicalities and with the ineptitude of the administration, its inability to squarely confront the issues.

Robert Wistrich: I agree with the proposition that it starts with the Jews but never stops with them. But I would also point out that this method of Jewish self-defense was tried in many countries before the Holocaust with mixed success. It is a matter of circumstances which are too complex to go into. It's not a foolproof formula. Secondly, on the issue of psychology and psychopathology, I don't think anybody here actually said that the Nazis were sick, although I take it that you're not suggesting that they were normal either. These concepts are not particularly useful to work with.

My point was that I find it somewhat disappointing that our *psychological* understanding of the dynamics of prejudice, of anti-Semitism and indeed of many forms of racism and ethnic hatred has not advanced very considerably in the last forty years. Perhaps Edith, who is an expert in this field, might want to say something about that. I was very struck by the fact, for instance, that Sigmund Freud himself, the founder of psychoanalysis, barely dealt with the issue, although it was something which as a Viennese Jew he suffered from very acutely throughout his life. Perhaps it's an unfortunate legacy that Freud, for reasons we don't have time to go into, chose not to apply his psychoanalytic skills in any great depth to this problem. I do believe that we need greater insight and understanding. I don't think we should be too dismissive of the possibility that psychology might one day help us in some ways. Unfortunately it hasn't particularly succeeded up to now.

Edith Kurzweil: Actually, psychoanalysts have tried to get to the roots of these problems. However, to some extent they, themselves, may be ideologues, or addressing the issues in terms of the *Zeitgeist*.

Question: The study that found intellectual blacks to be anti-Jewish is, I think, absolutely not to the point. As a high-school English teacher in Brooklyn for many years, I found, at least for the last fifteen years, that those teenagers who were mostly on the low socio-economic level were

overwhelmingly anti-Semitic. Jews to them were the biggest joke in the world. Since this whole problem is deep-rooted and goes way back, the most important and virulent part being irrational, is there any possibility that we might gain something, in terms of equalizing the playing field, if we used irrational attack methods as a way of partly dealing with the problem?

Robert Wistrich: I don't know about irrational methods, I certainly wouldn't advise anybody to look to that as a solution. But I would say that I believe the only collective political solution the Jews as a people have found to anti-Jewish violence was the creation of the State of Israel. That did not definitively solve the issue of anti-Semitism, as we all know, and in fact it even helped to create some new forms of it, but it has nevertheless fundamentally changed the contours of the problem and made it something that Jews can face with greater frankness and with a greater sense of self-confidence. I believe that it is not a final answer, but the establishment of Israel made a bigger difference than all the things ever done before that.

Stanley Crouch: I just want to say that I think that the problem of black anti-Semitism is nowhere near as large as people think it is. I want to say very clearly that I don't think you can evaluate the nature of a particular community by how particular professors relate to their students in what have been called "victims' studies courses," because as often as not, those professors are there on the basis of very specious ideas held by the institutions themselves. And they often maintain their positions primarily because "victims' studies" on campus is about the ransoming of campus order. So what college campuses do is, they say, "Well, how much money will it cost us to keep the black students' feet off the president's desk this year? Oh, two or three hundred thousand? Give it to them. How much to keep the homosexuals' feet off? Two hundred thousand? Give it to them. How much to keep the women out? Three hundred thousand? Give it to them." That's how it actually works. Now what happens is oftentimes you'll end up with charlatans like Leonard Jeffries, who was replaced by a black professor who discovered that for twenty years Jeffries had done no research, he had written nothing, nor had anybody else in his department. But when Jeffries went to court, he had letters from the white man saying, "Yeah, you're doing a good job, man. Doing a good job, man." Now as far as I'm concerned he should have won forty million dollars from them. They should have been made homeless; the entire administration that made the decision should have been put on videotape and those videotapes should have been sent to every American university, and it should have said to

all administrators, "This could be you."

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. We have four speakers at the next session, and again we're going to have questions at the end. I'm going to introduce the speakers: first, Stanley Crouch. He is the author of *Notes of a Hanging Judge: A Collection of Essays on Race Relations and Democracy in America* and is a noted jazz and cultural critic, teacher and lecturer. He has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Whiting Award, a MacArthur Fellowship, and the Jean Stein Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is working on a novel and a biography of Charlie Parker.

Next is Eugene Genovese, Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at the University Center in Georgia. He is the author of *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, and his newest book *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism*, will be published this fall.

Next to him is Martin Peretz; he has been Editor-in-Chief of *The New Republic* since 1974. He has received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy *honoris causa* from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as many other honorary degrees, and in 1982 was awarded the Jerusalem Medal. He is past chairman and now honorary chairman of the Jerusalem Foundation, and he is a director of the Fund for an Open Society.

Last is Jim Sleeper, a columnist for the *New York Daily News* who writes frequently on urban affairs. From 1988 to 1993 he was on the editorial board of *New York Newsday*. His essays and review have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Commonweal*, and other publications. He has taught at Harvard University, Queens College, and New York University, and he is the author of *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York*.

Stanley Crouch: My first comment is, what a bowtie, Saul, what a bowtie! I'm going to read what I have written and then put an improvised coda on it.

I distrust autobiography when large issues are discussed, because it assumes that the writer's experience is equal to the subject under discussion. But, being a modern man and a citizen of New York, I have chosen to submit to contemporary custom, and have put together a collage of writing about anti-Semitism. Before I begin, however, I would like to make a suggestion. I believe that the article of speech, "T-H-E,"

when used as in “The Jews,” reduces, crushes, a remarkably varied people into a sloppy and interchangeable mass: that is the essence of anti-Semitism.

Part One: The Mickey Finn and the Minstrel Face. The connection between Negroes and Jews is one that has been nearly exhausted in discussions, whether serious or anti-Semitic. More often than not, the talk circles around abundant clichés of “mutual difficulties with societies spiritually afflicted by prejudice.” This is true, but far too simple. The coming to power of Christendom led to Jews being demonized by the dark and poisonous side of the udder from which drips also the milk of Western civilization. So if someone somewhere in the world takes Horace Greeley’s suggestion and goes West, culturally, the trip might lead to as much darkness as light, for our prejudices are as much of who we are as is our high-mindedness. For instance, one can be sure that when Commodore Perry arrived in Japan a hundred and fifty years ago, he didn’t sit in paper houses sipping tea and listening to complaints about Jews.

Since then, however, the Mickey Finn of anti-Semitism has been squeezed into those Far Eastern cups, which is why Japanese businessmen show themselves as most unfortunately Western when they speak of Jewish conspiracies in the business world, not minding that the Japanese dependency on Middle Eastern oil has nothing to do with Jews; not minding that there are no meaningful numbers of Jews in Japan. They are late arrivals in a very old tradition. Neither Negro-Americans nor black Africans have had the ongoing demonic role imposed on them that Jews have. Most of the anti-black justifications for unfair play came into our American lives long after John laid down the lousy laws about Jews in the New Testament. Slavery, of course, transformed Africans who were considered livestock into Americans. As Americans, Negroes have also been Christians – a commonality held with the whites who so often made their lives so hard – and saw in the same Christianity the moral reasons to revolt against the dictates of slavery and the later racist ideas put into segregated policy.

But there is a strong connection between Negroes and Jews in our society, and it has played itself out quite profoundly in show business, for one, where exchanges took place that are rarely discussed with any accuracy. In that arena, which has had such a large influence on our national sensibility, the most important thing about the relationship of Negroes and Jews to American music and popular entertainment is the fact that the Negro has long been a symbol of pure Americana. What is never observed about, say, the early film *The Jazz Singer* is that the convention of blackface served as a way of entering big-time American show business.

It was a mask that freed the Al Jolson character in the film, Jakie Rabinowitz, of his Eastern European identity. He became Jack Robbins. But, if you recall, when the real Jolson was an immigrant kid without blackface, he performed in bars doing Negroid dance and song routines, shuffle-dragging and sliding his body for the entertainment of afternoon drinkers. In fact, if you look at a good number of successful Jewish-American entertainers of Jolson's generation, you will discover how the mask of the Negro, even so insultingly simplified, helped them through the hoop of popular art. However racist, the blackface, the rolling eyes, the physical rhythms, and the long march of expressions from comedy to pathos formed a means of instruction. This was the most immediate way of learning how to express the rhythms and timbres of American feeling.

I would suggest that what is most important about the parallels between Negroes and Jews is the tragicomic sensibility, as it has translated itself into music, dance, comedy, and drama. From the Old Testament's tragic vision of human frailty, from the Passion of Christ and perhaps the greatest blues line ever written, "Father, why hast thou forsaken me?" Negroes fashioned one side of their vision: perhaps from the incantational percussion of Africa, and what I can only call a heriocl recognition of the vibrance at the center of existence, Negroes have transmuted pathos and tragedy into exultation through the rhythmic lyricism of swing. And if there is anything we can recognize when we speak of Jews, especially the Russians who came into American show business, it is a very definable and unusual quality. I can only describe it as a cynical *joie de vivre*; in short, another kind of tragicomic sensibility.

Finally, for their part, I believe that Jews, because they were neither black nor Christian, were able to sense perhaps the connecting elements of the national soul, and to produce work that spoke with democratic accuracy to Negroes and whites. This, of course, is something that Negroes did as well. And when Negroes and Jews stared each other in the eye aesthetically, I can only say what Count Basie said of Lester Young, a single syllable that compresses the explosive vitality of this congress of form and human feeling: "Wow!"

Part Two: Blues for the Day. In the contemporary world there is much concern about the purported spreading of the Jew-baiting blues by people like Louis Farrakhan. Many think this indicative of the fact that something is going on in black America. As with most ideas about Negroes that arrive through mass media and through the short-order pulse-takings of our academies, this stuff is overrated and no more than the kind of hysteria which anti-Jewish feeling always whips up. While the Crown Heights business was burning itself into the New York night, there were all kinds of lamentations about increasing racial hostility in

this town; but when a local news reporter was finishing up her television spiel with the hand-me-down phrase, "Reporting from embattled Crown Heights," a number of black kids who were standing around interrupted her and observed that they didn't know who those violent people were in their streets every night. The kids said those people didn't live in the community, in the neighborhood, and were coming from somewhere else. They themselves had lived around Jews all their lives, these young people told the television reporter, and made it clear that they got along well with them. When Pete Hamill went out into the Crown Heights streets he corroborated that fact: the bottle-throwers and name-callers were from outside the community. In other words, it was a setup, just as the Washington Heights riot was rigged by drug dealers to make it clear to the police that when one of their dealers' fellow traders in addictive powders went down under the lawmen's bullets, they would go to the streets. There are divisive forces out here, but they represent tips, not icebergs. For all the attention, the ranks of the Nation of Islam don't swell. They have never swelled.

One central reason for this is that Negro-Americans are not puritanical and have never been attracted to religious orders that frowned upon joy. The members of the Nation of Islam are a dour bunch; far too dour to ever appeal to more than a cult faction of the black American community. Louis Farrakhan, Khalid Muhammad and Chicago's Steven Cokely are applauded for the way they shake an anti-Semitic Mickey Finn, but few step up to the bar. What we really have, and this is also connected to the denial of the murders of European Jews, is the desire for recognition through the outrageous. This cannot be disconnected from the fact that our society has celebrated for far too long the romantic idea of rule-breaking, not the rich complexity of mediating between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law; a theme that, as Peter Stowell observes, John Ford addressed so brilliantly in his films about the challenges at the center of American democracy. Our democracy is founded on a high-minded conception of commonality and individuality, not narcissism and perpetual alienation. But if we accept alienation as a painful iron mask no one can see through and through which we cannot express our souls, we too often mistake hostility for the highest expression of honesty, and vulgarity for vitality. At least since the loss of faith that arrived with Black Power and followed Vietnam and Watergate, we have failed to prove, over and over and over as all civilizations must, what the burdens and wonders of civilized behavior and discourse really amount to; one of which is standing up to irrationality, not worshipping it as the deformed child of encounter-group therapy we pat on the head and call beautiful.

Those black kids who invite nutville Nation of Islam types onto

their campuses are involved in a political version of rock and roll, a way of being outrageous and driving the adults up the walls. In this case, the adults are the whites and the black academics who have faced the interwoven nature of our American identities. When the academic commodity sales of alienated futures resulted in such heavy trading on campuses, many were afraid to accept their American identities. They want to chuck the hyphen and what comes behind it. They want to be ethnic students first and foremost; their own versions of what they think Jews are. What we are talking about is the unflagging certitude we associate with the most strong-minded Jews. We are talking about the invincible proof of the power of the written word, the text that has carried Jews through century after century. This results, unfortunately, in some places, in what I call "oppression envy" on the parts of those who don't have great tales encoded with the level of insights into the human soul that beget the high understandings of our strengths and of our weaknesses; that tell us, as the Bible does, of the ominous responsibilities of power; that tell us, over and over, how even the most enlightened can fall to brutal humiliation. Even for all the inroads into our lives of the martial arts and the various schools of meditation and Buddhism and cuisine have had, adding an Eastern set of spices to the goulash of our American culture, the heaviest weight still comes from the Judeo-Christian heritage.

Oppression envy is mostly connected these days to World War II. It was the crucifixion of Jews in modern Europe that saved us from having too much confidence in civilization. It was a heavy tab, a tab paid in blood and one we must always remember, because what happened to the European Jews is humbling. We have to face how easy it is to mistake a toilet seat for a throne and slide down into the spiritual feces of xenophobia most foul. Genocide, without a doubt, is xenophobia most foul. Perhaps the history of the world is the history of how societies addressed xenophobia; to what degree they fear or persecute the Other, welcome the Other, learn from the Other. But the xenophobia that cuts at the flesh and souls of Jews is not one that comes of being unfamiliar. It is a protean xenophobia: if you hate books, you can hate Jews; if you hate business, you can hate Jews; if you hate the law, you can hate Jews; if you hate crime, you can hate Jews. For the anti-Semite, Jews exist in an endless department store that sells only resentment, paranoia, and irrationality. Because the Jew is both Moses and Jesus, we might be talking about a remarkable tale of the Oedipal impulse.

I want to conclude by saying that I have, from my experience in the world, absolute confidence in the fact that we will come through all of this; that these various yahoos and demagogues and rednecks of one hue or another will periodically bark at the gates; they will sometimes ring the bell; they may even be able to get past the doorman and defecate on

the floor. But we'll clean the floor, believe me, we'll clean the floor. I don't think that we are doomed to sink down into the Babel of alienation between one group and another, that so many people today see as the fate of America. I think, finally, that when we look at almost any group of immigrants we see that there is a centripetal force to the American sensibility that pulls people in. I remember once I was sitting next to some people from either Iran or Iraq, and they lived in New Jersey, and they were the grandparents of two teenaged girls who were sitting behind them. Now, the two grandparents were dressed in formal, traditional Muslim clothes, they had gotten a kosher meal – they didn't like that word too much, but they ate it – and while they were eating, behind them were their two equally, I guess, Muslim granddaughters. Both of them had on extremely tight jeans, tight T-shirts with no brassieres, and tennis shoes. They both had Walkmans, and they were in the back moving to the music. Now, that perhaps didn't mean that they didn't pray five times a day and embrace the invincible truth of Allah, but it does show that they also had been pulled into the American sensibility, into American culture.

I think that what the Italian filmmaker Sergio Leone said about America is extremely important for all of us to understand. He said that what American film and entertainment did was to create an international language because it had to speak across such a greatly complicated democratic mass, and that was the reason why it not only spoke so well to all Americans, but spoke so well to people around the world. And I think that as we come in contact with each other, whatever our backgrounds are, the charisma of humanity will neutralize most of the irrational stuff we are beset by at this particular time. I have often heard people say that our fates are all the result of decisions made in smoke-filled rooms, that there are unflagging prejudices that will never give in, but one of the things that always comes to me is the fact that Frederick Douglass used to give addresses at a time when there was no knowledge of blood plasma; none of the scientific knowledge we have used to neutralize most racist ideas was available. Douglass would speak to people who were rather curious to see what this perhaps half-human person had to say, and oftentimes by the end of his addresses the entire room would be abolitionist. This is something that took place over a hundred and fifty years ago. I don't think that America has lost that spirit at all, I think that there are storm clouds that appear, but I think we're going to get through it. And to close out, I have to quote Louis Armstrong. He said: *Bop bi da, dop di da, dop di bop a do di di di bop bi bop bi bop bi da* – that's Louis Armstrong on George Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So."

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you, Stanley Crouch. As long as there'll be more like you, I'm sure your optimism is well taken. Next we'll have Gene Genovese.

Eugene Genovese: Let me say at the outset that I've been fascinated by the discussions among Jews about how Jews should fight anti-Semitism. I think that's entirely proper. But speaking as a Gentile, I don't tell Jews how to be Jews, any more than as a white man I try to tell blacks how to be black. I hope you understand the context of my remarks as the responsibility of Gentiles to the struggle against anti-Semitism, and what is incumbent upon us folks.

Concern over the resurgence of anti-Semitism has arisen primarily in response to the events in the black community, and we may as well be frank about it. Those who suggest an overreaction among Jews and other whites have a point. For even if the black community were generally anti-Semitic – and it is not – we would have little to fear from it. Blacks simply do not have the power to mount a serious threat, for they are themselves being savaged to a much greater extent than any other section of our people. Never before in American history have so many blacks found themselves so economically well off and socially secure. Yet, paradoxically, never before have so many found themselves in straits so desperate as to invite despair. Demagogues naturally feed off despair, and today we are looking at responsible statistical projections of a majority of young black males dead, in jail, or on drugs by age twenty-five or so. A more fertile recruiting ground for neo-Nazism would be hard to imagine.

The outbursts of anti-Semitism among blacks, however much exaggerated, are therefore a cause for concern, especially since they would not have caused a ripple if they had not, in effect, been fueled by powerful sectors of white America. It should be enough to note that Louis Farrakhan commands a pathetically small group of ten or twenty thousand, whereas decent and respectable Black Muslim groups are much larger but get no publicity. Yes, he gets rousing responses among blacks wherever he speaks. So does every other black politician who kicks white butt, the harder the better. Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam are creatures of an irresponsible, white-dominated mass media and of cynical politicians. The extent to which Farrakhan's anti-Semitism, and, more broadly, his neo-Nazism – for that is what it is – resonates in black communities remains difficult to assess. In itself, it constitutes grounds for vigilance but hardly panic. Consider, for example, the sudden appearance of anti-Semitism on college campuses. It would have no prospects there, were it not for the support given it by the unprincipled administrators

who routinely capitulate to white opportunists for whom the travail of black Americans is little more than a stalking horse for their own ideological agenda.

The argument for the widest free speech on the campuses need not detain us. Let us grant that Farrakhan – or David Duke – should be permitted to spew his poison on campus. It does not follow that a dime of university funds should be expended towards that end. And there is no excuse for permitting private paramilitary forces to set foot on campus, let alone paying for them out of university funds. College presidents are responsible for the safety and security of their campuses as well as for genuine free speech, and they do have the resources to maintain order. If they cannot do their job, they ought to be sacked.

The current resurgence of anti-Semitism is hardly surprising. It is commonplace of history that when times are bad – when discrete groups feel threatened or abused – they single out Jews as scapegoats. Before we panic, we would do well to note that the potential mass base among whites for a dangerous anti-Semitic movement is probably smaller today than at any time in our nation's history. The Christian right, for example, which in the past has sometimes proven a recruiting ground for anti-Semitic movements, is now largely held by people like Pat Robertson, who, whatever his sins, has a splendid record of opposition to white racism as well as anti-Semitism. Recall that Robertson was the first national politician of note to sound the alarm against David Duke, and that he vigorously and effectively campaigned to defeat Duke's gubernatorial aspirations in Louisiana, denouncing him as a counterfeit Christian, a racist, and an anti-Semite.

Robertson and the leaders of the Republican Party forcefully repudiated David Duke and made clear that they would not associate with any Republican leader who cozied up to him. In contrast, the leaders of the Democratic Party have accepted, without a word of protest, people like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Carol Moseley Braun, and Kweisi Mfume, who have refused to declare the Nation of Islam beyond the pale. The arguments are worth reviewing. First, we hear that blacks, being genuinely oppressed, cannot afford to exclude anyone from their ranks. (Jews should be familiar with this gambit since a Jewish version has cost them dearly on more than one occasion.) Second, we hear that, after all, Jesse Jackson and people like him do not endorse the Nation of Islam's anti-Semitism, but merely endorse its positive work in the ghettos and some of its economic ideas. Third, we hear the pompous pseudo-theorizing according to which "racism means prejudice plus power" and since blacks lack power, they cannot be racist.

The problem with this demagoguery is that all of these points were made in defense of Mussolini, Hitler, and every other political terrorist –

right down to David Duke. The Nazis, on their road to power in the Weimar Republic, did splendid work for the unemployed, feeding thousands of hungry workers who had been abandoned to their fate. On this matter I must respectfully take issue with Saul Bellow, who, in his eloquent remarks last night, suggested that Hitler offered the German people little more than Jew-hating. To the contrary, he offered them a social revolution that promised to end a ghastly depression and restore stability and purpose to a society that was wallowing in moral degeneracy and political instability. Let us not deceive ourselves: Hitler delivered on his promises, albeit at a cost no civilized people should be willing to pay.

And here at home the Ku Klux Klan, in its palmy days, performed all sorts of discreetly praiseworthy services for poor whites, and occasionally, even for poor blacks. From Mussolini and Hitler to pale imitators like Duke, vicious political movements have been able to say – with a measure of truth – that they speak for the dispossessed and wretched of the earth, on whom the Establishment and the public have turned their backs. In view of the bloody history of our century, we no longer accept such excuses for whites and should ask ourselves why we accept them for blacks. And since most such racist and anti-Semitic movements have arisen from among those with legitimate claims to being sorely oppressed and excluded from power, the argument that black racism is an oxymoron reveals itself as untenable, not to say mendacious.

Anti-Semitism is by no means the only form of bigotry that demands vigilant monitoring and vigorous counterattack. The growing assault on the Roman Catholic and neo-evangelical Protestant churches should not go unnoticed. And what should we say of the equanimity with which the Democratic Party politicians, the media, and too many others bore the disgraceful, blatantly anti-Italian campaign mounted by Robert Abrams during the last senatorial election here in New York? But experience has taught Gentiles to be especially sensitive to anti-Semitism, not only because the Holocaust properly haunts our consciences, but also for a more selfish reason: anti-Semitism almost invariably opens the floodgates to other atrocities and therefore threatens all of us.

It is time to resurrect the slogan, *No pasaran!* and mount a relentless counterattack. The place to begin is in our political parties. The Republican Party, to its everlasting credit, repudiated and isolated David Duke. The Democratic Party must do the same for those who cotton to Farrakhan and others like him. The crime of McCarthyism was not that it practiced guilt by association. Guilt by association is an honorable and necessary rule in politics. (Try living without it sometime.) The crime of McCarthyism was that it applied the rule irresponsibly, dishonestly, and

cruelly. As a long-time citizen of New York, I voted for Mario Cuomo every time he ran for office and would like to vote for him again, were I not now, happily, a citizen of Georgia. (I confess that I have to vote for him because I always vote for Italians unless I have a strong reason not to.) But I would not vote for him or anyone else who refuses to repudiate Jesse Jackson and the left wing of the party unless he and they repudiate Farrakhan completely.

As for the right, it is by no means out of the woods. Personally, I am by no means convinced that Pat Buchanan is a racist or an anti-Semite, notwithstanding his frequent displays of genuine insensitivity toward blacks and Jews. Buchanan's soul may be left to God. Our problem lies elsewhere. He speaks for a great many workers and lower-middle-class people in the American heartland who are being ignored and trifled with by the politicians of both parties. Whatever his personal future, those people will not go away. We should not be surprised to see the rise of a broad-based political insurgency against both the liberals who espouse the politics of moral degeneracy and the conservatives who espouse the politics of complacency. Buchanan may turn out to be an incidental predecessor to a leader who is actually guilty of what he himself is often accused of. For reasons I suspect need no review here, many on the right are especially susceptible to white racism and anti-Semitism, or at least have been so historically. It will take a clear eye, moral fortitude, and nerves of steel for a political leader who courts that potentially huge constituency to repudiate the sinister elements within it. Let us worry less about the subjective attitudes of Pat Buchanan or anyone else and keep our eye on the main point: the demand that every politician unambiguously reject not only the support of blatant racists and anti-Semites, but also the support of those who associate with them under any excuse or pretense.

The struggle against anti-Semitism cannot be separated from the struggle against racism, or the campaign to destroy the very idea of an American nationality, or the issues in the so-called Cultural War. The exponents of the totalitarianism now derisively called "political correctness" are aiming their hardest blows against Western civilization itself and against the very idea of a distinct American nationality. I think it is unfortunate that William Bennett, in his brave rebuttals, should be driven to proclaim the superiority of the Western civilization over all others. I would remind him of what his fellow conservative, Eric Voegelin, wisely observed – that the notion of the stagnation of the East disappears once we reject the dubious notion of the moral progress of the West. As a Christian philosopher, Bennett should not have to be told that the illusion of moral progress of the West has historically been inseparable from anti-Christian infidelity and murderous political utopianism. But Bennett

is not wrong to demand respect for a Western civilization that has brought the world to undreamed-of heights of personal freedom, as well as material prosperity.

As an historian and a nonbeliever, I am prepared to concede to Bennett that the degree of personal freedom we now take for granted – the political ideals that are now being embraced by the peoples of the whole world – arose in the West on Christian foundations. The defense of Western civilization therefore requires firm respect for the Christian tradition that undergirds it. The assault on Western civilization and on Christianity that now disgraces our campuses has led inexorably to the assault on the idea of an American nationality and to the suicidal program for the transformation of our nation into a loose federation of People's Republics of Purported Victims.

These are big and complicated issues. So let me cut to the bottom line with respect to anti-Semitism and America's relation to Israel. It is dangerous for our government to base its support for Israel on the democratic character of the Israeli state. Suppose events compel Israel to curb its democracy and install an authoritarian regime. That is unlikely but hardly impossible. (And it would be none of our business.) The American government should long ago have made clear that we will never permit the Jews to be "driven into the sea" and that we shall forcibly intervene to confront any idiots who try it.

Israel, as a Jewish state, constitutes a discrete part of the larger civilization that we must defend at all cost. Its existence and security must not be made a subject for discussion, much less of negotiations. The Jews, for all they have suffered at Christian hands, constitute a part of our historic family of nations. And on this matter I offer you the counsel of my Sicilian forebears: Wish others well; do your best to do them justice and accord them friendship. But the family comes first.

Nothing I am about to say should be taken to suggest that the Jews could safely rely on others to fight their battles or that they should surrender to anyone the initiative in the struggle against anti-Semitism. Rather, I am here concerned with the responsibility of the Gentiles, independent of what the Jews have to do for themselves. Speaking as a Gentile, I shall risk expressing myself in a way that may not be to Jewish taste. However much the Jews have been outsiders and dissenters from the religious mainstream, they have constituted an essential and belatedly appreciated part of our larger family of historic Christendom: They are, so to speak, "ours." He who assaults the Jews assaults "us" – and should be made to understand that "we" shall return the blows with the utmost ferocity.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you, Gene. Martin Peretz.

Martin Peretz: Gene Genovese is the creator of imaginative, sometimes puzzling, intellectual configurations. We've just heard him announce the formation of a group called "Marxists for Pat Buchanan."

I was a little baffled last night and again this morning when people were pressing Saul Bellow for his most up-to-date views on our current predicament, and may I suggest, to those who have not read them, and even to those who have: let's reread *The Dean's December* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*.

Historically, there have been many kinds of anti-Semitism in the United States. There's religious anti-Semitism, social anti-Semitism, political anti-Semitism, intellectual anti-Semitism, economic anti-Semitism, and, of course, there's also Jewish anti-Semitism. Each of these are at different points in the trajectory of ascendancy or decline, but for most of them, I have to say, the trajectory is one of decline. Anti-Semitism is of less valence, publicly, than at any time in my lifetime. And on any index of concrete experience, these manifestations of Jew-hatred do less damage to Jews than, again, at any time in my experience. There are not many recent experiences that any of us could muster, I suspect, of actually being touched, individually or as a group, by Jew-hatred. Perhaps this is unique to America: with Norman Podhoretz, I have faith in American exceptionalism. But all these rubrics and categories of anti-Semitism are not static states, and they are not always insulated from one another. What is true today, it is possible, may not be true tomorrow. And what is true today may not have been true yesterday or the day before yesterday. For example, in the Bush administration there emerged an insidious combination of elite social anti-Semitism by people who seemed not to hate Jews but were simply, let's say, allergic to Jews; and political anti-Semitism disguised, as Cynthia Ozick rightly pointed out, as sheer or mere opposition to some of the policies of Israel. This combination invoked old anti-Semitic stereotypes which did palpable harm to Israel and legitimated a debauch stretching from Gore Vidal and Alexander Cockburn to Gene's friend Pat Buchanan. When the President of the United States, whose administration probably had fewer Jews than any U.S. administration since Herbert Hoover, talked about those thousand lobbyists converging on Capitol Hill, he was evoking the Jews as, in fact, a political virus.

Of course, a lot of these people are still peddling their wares. But the pressure on Israel which they created, and the discomfort which it created among us, are no longer facts of our political life. The pressure they placed on Israel no longer has much resonance. It certainly doesn't resonate in Clinton's Washington, if only, perhaps, because the govern-

ment of Israel is now doing on its own initiative much of which James Baker wanted to twist its arm into doing.

On other indices, the changes have been relatively recent, but quite dramatic and transformative. In a very interesting observation last night, John Gross talked about how the Robert Maxwell story did not create an anti-Semitic environment. And which of us Americans didn't think about 1985 and 1986, years when, day after day, Jewish Wall Streeters were being exposed for having been involved in financial scandals of considerable weight and enormous amounts of money? We read their names without fearing that we were about to be swallowed up by some Weimarian deluge of anti-Semitism. My friend James B. Stewart, the author of *Den of Thieves*, once remarked to me, "You know, I didn't know all these people were Jewish until you told me."

I teach at Harvard, and when I went there in 1959, there was a mere handful of tenured Jews – or perhaps two mere handfuls, if you count those who didn't count themselves. At that time, there was no way you could have described Columbia University as "Columbia Jewniversity." But today, how many presidents of Ivy League colleges are Jewish? My wife descends from three Princeton University presidents, and at the inauguration of Harold Shapiro as Princeton's new president, she said, "Certainly all three of them are stirring angrily in their graves." Jews have joined Fortune 500 companies, the professions, in popular culture, even the clubs to which, God knows why, some Jews want to belong: I don't mean to be panglossian, it is not in my temperament to be a "tout va bienevich," but it seems to me that whatever anti-Semitism of valence there is in the United States is now lodged – not wholly, to be sure, but mainly – in those segments of society whose collective future history is not at all very promising, that is, among the most marginalized of the marginal groups in society.

Now one small factor here, and I do think it's a small factor, is the immigrant element. We saw it around the World Trade Center bombing. We saw it with the young man who shot at the Lubavitcher boys on the Brooklyn Bridge, and I think it bears watching. But it does not bear hysteria or panic. Arab and Muslim immigrants used to come to this country as our ancestors used to come to this country. They came here with a psychological one-way ticket. They were coming to the New World and leaving the passions and rancors of the old world behind. We now have the paradox, crystallized in the figure of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, of someone who comes with all his rancors and passions, inflamed and intact, to America because he feels that he can practice Islam more freely in America than he can practice it in Egypt. But he also carries with him his rancors, not only against the Jews, not only against

Israel, not only against Zionism, but also against the silly country which welcomes him so freely. That is, there are now immigrants in the United States who come here not with the immigrant's psychological one-way ticket, not with the immigrant's love for America, but with a peculiar immigrants' hatred of America.

Let me also talk about black anti-Semitism, which is also tied, in a certain sense I think, to a febrile anti-Americanism, if perhaps of a superficial sort. Black anti-Semitism, or black Jew-hatred, presents a problem to whites and to white-owned institutions. It presents a problem even to Jewish-owned institutions which are loath to call Jew-hatred what it is because of a panicky and phobic reluctance to engage in any kind of honest discussion with blacks at all. Barbara Walters interviewed Louis Farrakhan and began, "Respectfully, Mr. Farrakhan. . . ." *The Washington Post* tried to ignore what was unfolding twenty-five blocks from its own headquarters. *The New York Times's* first article on Howard University was about how Howard administrators were angry that the university had been stigmatized, not about what it had been stigmatized by. (By the way, Howard University is a *public* institution. In the 1994 Federal budget there is an appropriation of \$193.7 million for Howard University. Since 1986, \$1.6 billion federal dollars have been spent on it. Yet this is, after all, a country which can't afford the supercollider. The issue is a public one, worthy of public discussion.) The anxiety about engagement with blacks on this issue is part of another problem. For example, the intellectual argument over affirmative action is over. There's really no standing, coherent, plausible intellectual defense of it as a policy. But it survives, intact, in policy, in the public, in the private, and in the voluntary sectors, and it will survive that way, not unnoticed but altogether undiscussed and unexamined. And that too is part of another whole problem: the retreat from any form of sustained contact between whites and blacks, because sustained contact requires truthful contact. So let me state a few propositions of truthful contact.

The first is very unpleasant to Jews, or at least it plays with part of our mythology: How big was the black-Jewish alliance? How deep did it cut? Well, I know there were Rabbi Abraham Heschel, a sage, and Rabbi Joachim Prinz, Leo Baeck's successor in Berlin and a great American Zionist. Then, there Jews who went South, mostly because they came from the political left, not because they were Jewish. These were not "Jewish actions" – going to Mississippi in 1954. In any case, in the fifties, when the seeds of the black civil rights struggle were planted, Jews had not yet arrived; we were not especially daring; we were not taking risks. Collectively we had just come out of the Holocaust; the State of Israel was not securely in place; we had other things on our

minds. And while, to be sure, Jews were less racist than other whites and supported the Democratic Party and its civil rights legislation, I believe that the black-Jewish alliance is a much, much exaggerated phenomenon, bordering on invention. In any case, emphasizing it will not bring a reunion of a party that was never held.

I also wonder why there isn't black anti-Irishism, or black anti-Italianism, and it occurs to me – actually, it first occurred to my great friend Eric Breindel – that it may be because Irish and Italians don't hold a lot of reconstructive, therapeutic dialogues. It also occurs to me, by the way, that it's quite profitable to be an enemy of the Jews, or at least not a friend of the Jews. Jesse Jackson hasn't done badly by that. He shades his opinion – there are some things about Farrakhan he doesn't like – but in my view, and it's only my view, Jackson was the black political leader who legitimated anti-Semitism among young blacks, much more than Farrakhan, who now is reaping the rewards. But regarding such Jew-hatred as there is among blacks, and I take Stanley Crouch's views on this very seriously (I take Stanley Crouch's views on everything very seriously, I just wish he would give more of them to my magazine), it emerges among other trends in the black population which are separatist and therefore also self-separating. It may be that some blacks once thought of Jew-hatred as meshing them with other whites in the antique hatred, but this is no longer the case. If you listen to Farrakhan's or to Khalid Muhammad's speeches, the Jews are right there with the Gentiles, the Pope, the Koreans and the Asians. The ugly emergence of Jew-hatred among many blacks, vicious and pathetic at once, is part of the contemporary black failure, in contrast to which the Asian-Americans are at least as vivid as we are. The disintegration of the family structure, the decline of communal institutions and infrastructures, the vulnerability to crime and to drugs, the fact that there aren't enough Ph.D.'s to hire when students demand them – Stanley was quite right, there are many more black members of the middle class than ever, but they are also losing. They're losing jazz to rap. By not going to church, they're losing their exquisite command of the English language, which I think will be seen in the next generation of black novelists. The fact is that American Jews are not very much imperiled by black anti-Semitism; it is blacks who are imperiled by black anti-Semitism. That is their tragedy at least as much as it is ours.

James Sleeper: Marty's closing remarks really dovetail with what I have to say. Stanley Crouch and I share the *Daily News's* op-ed page on Sunday; I'd love to say that we are the Louis Armstrong and Ira Gershwin of the Sunday op-ed page, but maybe I'm John Philip Sousa

next to Stanley. Anyway, I do write a column three days a week for the *Daily News*, which has a black readership of about three hundred and fifty thousand. Sometimes it seems as if I hear from all of them, and two weeks ago I was honored on the front page of *The Amsterdam News* as the “house apologist for white hatred and rage against blacks in the city.” So some of the kinds of things that Norman Podhoretz and others have spoken about, I experience on a regular basis. And yet I have to endorse Stanley’s comment, on the basis of my own experience, that the rise in black anti-Semitism has to be contextualized to a certain extent, to be understood as an upsurge within a much larger sea that remains relatively calm. I realize it’s tricky to say that, but it’s important to understand that context.

A black leader with a large following in New York City reminded me recently of something I already know well from sixteen years of fairly close engagement as a journalist with black activists, clergy, and elected officials: Most of the two million New Yorkers whose skin happens to be black are as baffled as most Jews are by black anti-Semitism. “I and my people are walking around with a quizzical look on our faces,” said my interlocutor. “Our daily interactions are with ‘white people,’ not Jewish, Italian, or Irish people as such. I think Jews are far more conscious of their own typically ‘Jewish’ names and facial features than we are. When we draw distinctions among whites, it tends to be among individuals, not ethnic groups. When I see the mainstream publicity lavished on Farrakhan, who is as alien to me as the man in the moon, I can’t help but wonder whether it’s some kind of plot to stigmatize and isolate all blacks as anti-Semites.”

The man has a point worth keeping in mind precisely because it is so easily eclipsed by the media’s coverage of the signal clashes between blacks and Jews. Even when black anti-Semitism is most visible and virulent, one might argue, perversely, that it’s good for the Jews because the very disrepute into which black politics and scholarship have fallen reinforces rather than erodes mainstream taboos against public expressions of anti-Semitism. The deepening isolation of blacks, who are in some respects the most American of us all, is a tragedy of incalculable dimensions. But the fact remains that most Americans – Hispanic and Asian Americans as much as whites – think that blacks just don’t get it, that they’re utterly clueless about how to use the economic and political resources available to them even in the teeth of racism that, in some contexts, remains ubiquitous and routine. Those who worry that blacks understate their anti-Semitism to pollsters need only remember how even more understated is other poll respondents’ contempt for what they see of black urban leadership and culture.

In New York City alone, black misleadership has managed to burn its community's bridges to Asians in the Korean boycott, to feminists in the Central Park jogger case, to gays through the rantings of Farrakhan, Leonard Jeffries and others, and even to many moderate liberals. In Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Miami, and Philadelphia, as well as in New York, the new, interracial majorities that have elected the current mayors are in some respects antiblack coalitions. Indeed, in the last few years Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York have replaced black mayors with white centrists, even as the complexions of their electorates have grown darker. I am not suggesting that Jews can be sanguine about black anti-Semitism, but I do see a lot of antibodies to this disease and a lot of potential alliances against its carriers.

When Leonard Jeffries gave his famous speech in Albany three years ago, I wrote – in *The Nation*, to widespread assent, no less – that “the question is not whether Jeffries’ charges are true, or taken out of context. The question has to be why, with a dozen black film directors moving mainstream audiences, Jeffries waves a list of dead Jewish movie moguls . . . why, after the Korean boycott highlighted a black economic desperation that is no longer mediated primarily by Jewish merchants, he talks about Jews in the slave trade.”

There are historical reasons, of course. Jeffries and Farrakhan have made Jews surrogates for the white establishment and exaggerated their marginal role in slavery because, in their own personal experience – which, in keeping with the premises of identity politics, they conflate with racial truth – Jews have been the classic intermediaries between urban elites and the black poor. If you were a black New Yorker in the 1950s, Jews often did decide whether you got an apartment, job, passing grade, welfare check, or probation. “In most cases,” notes black newspaper publisher Andrew Cooper, “the encounters were not unfriendly. But there’s bound to be a reaction when you feel people are manipulating your life and have power over what you can achieve.”

During the long, ugly black boycott of two Korean stores in Brooklyn in 1989, I asked a Jewish community relations expert for his assessment. “It’s wonderful,” he said, with only a trace of irony. “The mayor’s not Jewish, so they’re not taking potshots at us there; the merchants aren’t Jewish, so they aren’t hitting us there, either. We can be like the Quakers now, we can mediate!” Enter Jeffries and Farrakhan, a decade or two late, ushering their listeners into a psychic landscape flickering with old, familiar demons. I suspect that one of the reasons they attract a campus following is that Jews still do serve as intermediaries in the academy – as the scholars, teachers, and administrators who lecture, evaluate, and govern black students and junior faculty.

Yet the residual bumping and grinding of struggles for ethnic succession between blacks and Jews doesn't fully explain the demagogues' allusions, for no other white group has given more than the Jews, individually and collectively, in dollars, votes, activism, and moral witness, to black struggles for justice. In a curious way though, this side of the story, too, helps to explain the anti-Jewish obsession. Simply put, the demagogues understand that Jews are white folks whose skin you can get under. Baiting them gets a rise out of at least a part of the white establishment, no small thing for aggrieved blacks to whom no one listens. Out of their peculiar mix of insecurity and idealism, Jews do listen. They are the first among whites to take alarm at black rage. Others show far less concern, and, truth to tell, some of them don't care much for Jews, either. That takes a lot of the risk out of the posture of defiance, and I think it points up something important: There is a kind of mind-game going on here that is more a testimony to black impotence and to a certain kind of Jewish weakness than to black power.

Consider Steven Cokely, the aide to former Chicago Mayor Eugene Sawyer, who first charged that Jewish doctors were injecting AIDS into black patients. Why didn't he attack Chicago's much larger Polish or Irish communities? The answer is that Cokely understood intuitively what buttons he could push to get a response. At the risk of reinforcing an ethnic stereotype which Eugene Genovese alluded to only partly in jest, if you attack the Poles or Italians, you meet a wall of contemptuous indifference or a hail of blows with baseball bats. Attack the Jews, and they hold a conference at the 92nd Street Y.

At the same time, the monumental indifference of most whites to blacks helps explain the black community's long tradition of pyrotechnic rhetoric divorced from any sense of responsibility for its consequences. For a couple of centuries, black political rhetoric has tended to be flamboyant precisely because it was weightless, unable to move the walls of white ignorance and indifference. It's the ethos of being a "tree shaker, not a jelly maker," as Jesse Jackson puts it. The subtext is, "It is our duty to evoke and provoke; it is always someone else's duty – the real grownups? – to determine the truth and set matters to rights. We will spin our pain into webs of racial narrative and metaphor. Someone else, always someone else, will turn them into politics and policy."

State Senator David Paterson of Harlem, an accommodator of the Nation of Islam but also a canny observer of the problem, puts a somewhat different spin on this question of language: "In Jewish history, words of antagonism were often the catalyst for something much worse. Jews understand that language sets people off. It strikes terror and fear about what's coming next. Black bondage was physical before it was verbal. We didn't even speak the language of the slave traders, so what-

ever names they called us were secondary to what they'd already done to us."

Yet even these explanations of anti-Semitism revolving on black impotence and implacable non-Jewish racism take us only so far. Another problem is Jewish liberalism itself, which has reinforced black impotence through its own oversolicitude by sending the patronizing, even racist message that blacks cannot be held to the same standards as whites. That is a betrayal on our part of the American and Enlightenment dimensions of our heritage, as much as of the Jewish dimension. It reflects our unacknowledged and perhaps growing ambivalence about such quintessential Enlightenment and American values as rational analysis, individual rights, and color-blind meritocracy.

Critical race theorists and Afrocentrists argue – and this, I think, is their most tragic mistake – that because those nostrums have often been used as fig leaves for racist abuse, they are inherently racist. That there have been monstrous abuses, no one can question. But that the values I have mentioned represent historic human gains, perhaps especially in America, is also beyond dispute to everyone except some black leaders and youths. These values were as vital as oxygen to our parents and to us, and they are equally vital to many immigrants of color, who come to America precisely to escape ancient homeland feuds and the cobwebs of tradition. That is the intellectual basis, if you will, for the political alliance against black demagoguery I mentioned above.

Jews, who have seldom been able to resort to strength in numbers and even cruder instrumentalities of power, have had to stake their success – functionally, not just theoretically – on their faith in reason, individual rights and meritocracy. Truth to tell, we sometimes have put ourselves through extraordinary, Herzogian contortions to be worthy exemplars of the Enlightenment, perhaps in the context of an American exceptionalism that we hoped would be worthy of it, too. Saul Bellow's *Herzog* is indeed one of the most compelling testaments of that struggle.

Of course, even as most whites, Jews included, have preached a color-blind meritocracy, we have tended to provide for ourselves along carefully patrolled ethnic lines. The retaliatory parochialism of Black Power has forced us to acknowledge and sometimes even tout our own hyphenated Americanism. But, paradoxically, no one is more vulnerable to black attacks on the Enlightenment than those secular Jews who tried so very hard to shed their hyphens and to live in a world where, as George Steiner put it, "Only trees have roots. Men have legs, and are each other's guests." We who aspired to that cosmopolitan ideal have forfeited the ethnic and religious referents which might have permitted us

to answer the Afrocentrists and extreme multiculturalists on their own parochial terms.

For some of us, however, there is no going back. We are not Hasidim, we are not West Bank settlers, we are nothing if not consistent in our rejection of nationalism. Bellow's observation, that after the death of God there is only the contemplation of Jewish history, speaks to an important truth about our condition as secular American Jews. That, I think, is why we are so disoriented and appalled when blacks dismiss our efforts to live a more cosmopolitan life – when blacks, in effect, cancel the history of our own struggles to be children of the Enlightenment. We simply don't know what to answer when the word "Jew" is flung at us as an epithet. We have, as it were, no antibodies.

Yet I cannot agree completely with Cynthia Ozick that black anti-Semitism has nothing to do with us as Jews and everything to do with blacks. It has something to do with us precisely because, in this century, Jews and blacks have been the two groups with the deepest stakes in America's living up to its stated creed. And while we, who once lived next door to blacks, have made the promises of America and the Enlightenment work for us, too many blacks have not. In their view, we too breezily dismiss the racism that has blocked their path. Whether or not they are right, the resentment some blacks do feel toward us is not going away, though we need to remember that it is not unbounded. It is only when that resentment curdles from the inevitable hostilities of ethnic succession into a consuming hatred of the Enlightenment and America itself that we need to be ready to fight.

Somehow, even amid the desolation at the heart of the West which Bellow has mentioned, those of us who have practiced assimilation, who have taken for granted the exceptional nature of the American experiment, who have tried to build a distinctively American identity that is thick enough to live in, must act as if we believe in what we've been doing. We owe that to America and, indeed, to blacks, as much as to ourselves. Thank you.

Edith Kurzweil: I want to thank all the speakers. Now we're opening the discussion to the audience. Dan Rose?

Daniel Rose: We've heard many fascinating insights over these two days, worthy of comment, but there's been one historical distortion that should be put to rest, and I'd love Marty Peretz and Jim Sleeper, both of whom are good friends of mine, to comment on this. Point: Martin Luther King, Jr. told me, face to face, when he and I were having dinner as guests of Bayard Rustin, that in the whole history of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, of all the gifts of one thousand dollars

or more that he had ever received, over ninety percent came from Jews. Point: the Julius Rosenwald gifts to black education were without parallel in the history of American philanthropy. Point: we know about Schwerner, and we know about Goodman and the Freedom Riders, but of all the Freedom Riders who were active in the civil rights movement, over forty percent were Jews. And we can go on and on. Jews constitute two and one-half or thereabouts percent of the American public. If forty per cent of the Freedom Riders were Jewish and Jews are two and a half per cent of the public, then for heaven's sake, what do Jews have to do to show that they were not only in the forefront, but that the historical record shows that they did justify the appropriate recognition or acknowledgement of the role that Jews played in the black civil rights drive?

James Sleeper: I acknowledge that role. And my point about the role was not to suggest that it wasn't there, but that it had set up an interesting dynamic. I described the two groups as being uniquely dependent on America living up to its own stated creed, and I think that's what was largely behind the impulse of the Jews who gave. They understood the fragility of their own situation despite their wealth. So I'm not trying to cancel that history at all; I agree with it totally. But I think we have to understand that sometimes when you help someone – maybe this is true in individual relationships as well – and the person nevertheless fails, for whatever reasons, which may be extraneous or internal, what subsequently happens to that relationship is often not good.

Martin Peretz: Would you like to speak for me on this issue, Stanley?

Stanley Crouch: I think there is an incredible distortion, that Mr. Rose was referring to, about what happened. It's really simple: the thrust of the civil rights movement was destroyed by Stokely Carmichael and Ralph Brown when they threw the white people out of SNCC. I've been on many panels, and somehow these Negroes act like Martin Luther King, Jr. got killed and then Jesse Jackson ran for President, as if that intervening history didn't take place. Stokely Carmichael went from one end of the country to the other, honky-baiting and Jew-baiting. He was, largely, the one who inserted the issue of Israel as an imperialist country. That brought about what I call an innovation in anti-Semitism, which is that the Jew moves from the conspirator within, who's always dirty-dealing and stabbing you in the back, to the imperialist without.

So Stokely Carmichael, Ralph Brown, and the Black Panther party picked that up. LeRoi Jones helped to do that. These guys went from

one end of the country to the other speaking to cheering black student groups, et cetera, many of whom were cheering because they were afraid of being told they were not really being black if they questioned these kinds of ideas.

That was a major tragedy in American politics, because one of the things we have to address, whether we're talking about it from the standpoint of Marx or Freud or Einstein or Oppenheimer or a number of other people, is that in many ways Jews have functioned as extraordinary questioners about the quality of moral, social, and political life; sometimes nuttily, sometimes profoundly, oftentimes somewhere in the middle.

The Jewish middle class has a quality that has led me often to look upon its members as the shock troops of the national middle class. That is, if the rest of the middle class is standing at the edge of the pool, saying, "Is that water too cold to jump in?" somebody Jewish will say, "I'll jump in it!" – and then say, "Oh, maybe it is too cold." Now, that also has always functioned in politics. People settle a lot of problems in America as they always have, around dinner tables, on jobs, in barber shops and beauty parlors, et cetera. Essential to what happened in America, I would say, intellectually, during that period, was the willingness of many, many Jews – some of whom were professional intellectuals, some of whom were just successful people, whom I and many other people met during those years – to have gatherings at their houses. Bob Moses would come, and Fannie Lou Hamer would come to the homes of these Jewish professionals, who would introduce them to their friends: "Mabel, you must come over, we're having Bob Moses over tonight, he's registering people in Mississippi, you must meet this man, he has great things to tell you about what's going on."

This is a very important part of American history. This part has been either dismissed, or these people have been called limousine liberals. That's a bunch of bullshit. These were very important people, and Black Power had a deadly effect on that aspect of American politics. And until we face up to that, we're treating black people like children, and we're being very dishonest about American life during those years and in the years since.

Question: This is the first time I've heard mention of the split between the time when Martin Luther King, Jr. died and Jesse Jackson's candidacy as being a very volatile period in black history, where the Jew-baiting was instigated by a very small group of black people. Is that part of history being taught in universities and high schools across America?

Stanley Crouch: I'm not sure that it's being taught the way I would want to teach it, because I think, as Jim Sleeper and Marty were saying in part, that there is always an overly protective position that a number of people take if they are in a minority group. So they say, "Okay, we know this, but I don't know if it's good to talk about it publicly, because then that will give arms and ammunition to the opposition, who are just waiting for any excuse to crush us one way or another, anyway."

Martin Peretz: In other words, "Don't say it in front of the goyim."

Stanley Crouch: Exactly. And I think that's one of the problems, because so much of the political discussion about Afro-American life is based on the fact that it's all about the white man. It is all the white man. The white man is always Henry Higgins, and the black person is just Eliza Doolittle asking, "How do you say it, boss?" "Say it like this." "Okay, okay, I'll do it." And so if he teaches you the wrong word, you go the wrong way.

I think one of the things we've got to start talking about in terms of black leadership is this: leadership at this point is not about parades and press conferences. Those are just TV events. Leadership is when Maynard Jackson became mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, and the police force that had the largest number of police homicides of black teenagers was completely turned around. Jackson replaced the guy who was the police chief and reassigned him to guard airplanes at Hartsfield Airport. That's political leadership.

There was a point when the Arrow Shirt Company was going to move out of Atlanta and reduce the tax base. I think six hundred jobs were going to be lost. The company wanted to sell its property to Metro Atlanta. Maynard Jackson said, "If you don't stay in Atlanta, I'm going to tell Metro Atlanta that they're not going to get a blasting permit to build, so they won't buy your property." Now that's politics. Standing up with a sign saying "We need this," and blah blah blah, that's just a show. But in fact we do have black mayors, black police chiefs, and so on, all across the country.

I think it's much more important now to really find out what's going on inside cities under these administrations, and whether or not in terms of this particular subject that we're talking about now, that the mayors and the city councils are falling asleep when anti-Semites in positions of serious influence arise in those various cities. What some jerk like Louis Farrakhan says, with his bowtie and his constant congratulation of himself – that's just smoke. What would bother me would be something like what Saul Bellow was talking about, with Steven Cokely. Now that's a problem, when you have a nut in an administration who comes

out and constantly rants and raves in an anti-Semitic way, and the administration itself doesn't move on him. That's the kind of thing I'm more concerned about, more than whether or not a David Duke or a Louis Farrakhan arises.

Question: I'm a child of a Holocaust survivor, and I know too well that apathy is not the way to go. I can't say that things will blow over and feel good about it. I also can't agree with Eugene Genovese, that we feel protected by Christianity. We have never been protected by Christianity, and Christians themselves don't understand the Holocaust and the nature of the Holocaust. Within their own religion, although they are in the family of Jews and we are related, it is Jews who branched off and began Christianity. Jesus himself, the God of the Christians, is our most famous Jewish boy. Jews do not teach that all men are sinners, they teach that man is good, he is born good, he is born in the image of God. Our focus as Jews is our lives in this world at this very time.

If we just talk about these issues, and we don't have a proposal for action, our efforts will ultimately fail. We're alive not because we have had conferences throughout our history, we're alive because of Israel. So I am going to suggest a proposal in the tradition of our Biblical heroines Esther and Sarah and Miriam. The proposal is this: we have liberated fourteen thousand black Jews from Ethiopia, and maybe we can ask them to liberate us in this situation. We can call upon them, educate them to become ambassadors for the Jewish people here in this country, and to go into the black communities where there are pockets of anti-Semitism, where Jewish lives might be at stake, because we are being scapegoated for whatever is happening within the black community. We can ask them to go into the black community, and maybe they will be able to communicate with our black brothers, because they happen to be black and they also happen to be Jews; and maybe because they are black and Jews, they can protect us.

Eugene Genovese: Let me clear up one point. I thought I made it clear that under no circumstances do I think that the Jewish people would or should put themselves under the protection of Gentiles. If you want to commit suicide, that's a good way to do it; I acknowledge that. Beyond that, a people who don't fight for themselves first and foremost don't deserve respect, and that's true of the blacks who have to carry on their own fight their own way. I think very often, in evaluating the things they do and don't do, if certain lines are crossed it has to be opposed, but up to a point we also have to understand that

people, in struggling for survival and protecting themselves, are going to make mistakes. They must carry their own fight, and our own understanding must go as far as possible. My point is something else. Anti-Semitism is your problem first and foremost: fight it in the best way you can. It's also our problem, as it were, and I think it is important that the Gentile community and the politicians in it be made to understand their own responsibilities and not take a passive position. I don't care how hard the Jewish people in the United States or elsewhere fight: winning the struggle against a dangerous anti-Semitic movement will require allies, much as the struggle of black people requires allies.

In that sense one can say, you have your responsibilities, we have ours; they certainly do dovetail. But I hope my remarks were in no way taken as suggesting that I think the Christian community has a paternalistic responsibility to its little Jewish brothers. I have never held to such a position with regard to either blacks or Jews.

Stanley Crouch: The evangelical tradition that was referred to in the last comment from the audience, with regard to these black Jews, is largely a Christian tradition. Let's be serious about this. People talk about things like the survival of nations. From the moment that intercontinental ballistic missiles were created, from that very day, the fate of Israel was based upon the sympathy of other countries. The United States and Russia were constantly worrying about what that could mean to them. Had there been some international anti-Semitic surge, all these people would have had to do was go in there and program the computers and that would have been the end of that.

Now the thing is, I think, it is important that perhaps World War Two made it impossible for anyone who considered himself civilized to be satisfied with an irrational attitude towards Jews. Now that didn't mean that there weren't nuts who were constantly going to have such an irrational attitude. But the fate of black Americans in this country, of Jews, of every minority, is about the way in which the ideas of universal humanism are argued in positions of power and how they affect policy. If the majority of the people turn against you all, or turn against us, it's over. Now we can call it names, we can do this or that, but there are far too many more of them.

The impact upon the discussion of the dangers to every educated civilization when we discovered what the Nazis did is an invaluable lesson, and I don't think that's a lesson the world has forgotten. Now, there are going to be jerks who are going to jump up and say, "It didn't even happen," but I don't think they are going to win.

As important as anything is the fact, as Marty was saying, that people talk honestly and are able to assess what has been successful and what has

not been successful, and discuss how to expunge or expel the demons among us whenever they arise. That's what I think we've got to do. And we can't pretend that we're not inextricably connected to the Christian majority of the United States. But they don't have to act in an anti-Semitic fashion because they are Christians.

Robert Wistrich: I just want to take up the last point with regard to the Holocaust and its impact. It seems to me that there is yet another dimension to this which needs examination in looking at the tensions in black-Jewish relations. This is the problem of victimology and of martyrology and the way memory works, collective memory.

It seems to me that one feature of some of the more anti-Jewish statements, particularly from a number of black university professors, is that there is a competition going on of a particularly distressing kind, I would say, whereby the claims that a particular group can make on a national conscience, or the ways it reinforces the sense of unity and solidarity in its own constituency, are built on demonstrating victim status; and not just victim status, but being the preeminent victim. So on the Jewish side, the Holocaust is an overwhelming experience, a very real one, which becomes a central component of identity. And on the black side, the experience of suffering, of the slave trade and everything since, becomes a central component of black identity. And the two groups see themselves in the wider context of American society as justifying or arguing their own special claims.

Then it becomes more understandable, but very distressing, that some blacks would see the Jewish experience of the Holocaust not in the empathetic way that you've outlined, which I think is the way it should be seen, but rather as an obstacle that in some way has to be removed – in order that the black cry of rage and of nonrecognition by the wider society can be heard. It seems to me that some of the anti-Semitism actually is generated by this kind of distorted perception of memory.

Question: Martin Peretz raised some doubts about the Jewishness of the civil rights workers, and granted that perhaps many were assimilated Jews. But can't we argue that they used Jewish values, as we find in the Tanach and the Talmud, albeit in a secularized form, in much the same way that Theodor Herzl, who was a very assimilated Jew, used Jewish values to create a very successful movement?

Martin Peretz: I think you could argue that, and it may even be so. I was active in the civil rights movement: I was an SNCC militant in Cambridge from 1961 to 1966. Dan Rose is quite right, a lot of the

people who went South were Jewish, and a lot of people who gave money were also Jewish. I suppose some of them thought of themselves as active Jews, not believing Jews but active Jews who psychologically thought of themselves as Jews. Most of them, at least the young people who went South, however, thought of themselves as radicals and not as Jews. Their Jewish identity was a very problematic matter for them, because Jewishness was identified with tradition, and they thought of themselves as being on the cutting edge of progress and outside tradition. Even before Stokely Carmichael attacked Israel, Jewish nationalism embarrassed and sometimes even mortified these people. So I think it's a very complicated issue. I would say that very few Jews who joined the civil rights movements thought of that as joining a cosmic mitzvah.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. I just want to make one point here. Historians like Gene Genovese and Robert Wistrich, when they teach, will in fact touch on all of this history. But it's in the specific studies, where you have what Robert Wistrich referred to as victimology and martyrology, that these things are not being mentioned at all. There, you find a kind of ideologizing and politicizing of student groups. It started out in black studies; it went on to women's studies, to Holocaust studies, and then to a few others. From what I have observed, as someone within the university, this is where we will have to start working. Or maybe, as some argue, we ought to abolish these kinds of studies which create academic ghettos, and go back to what used to be called general studies.

Question: I'd like to comment on the susceptibility of Jews as targets of black racism, and on our inability to respond effectively. I'd like to suggest that there is a connection to the ineffectual American Jewish response over many years to Arab racism against Israel, and the subtle demonization of Israel in the American media which continues to this very day. I think it has affected our Jewish pride and our ability to respond. We haven't responded to Arab racism against Israel effectively in the media, and we haven't figured out how to respond to black racism. I think there's a lack of Jewish pride, which is apparent in some of the things that are going on in Israel today, tearing the society apart. In our own communities, in organizing, we can't find this Jewish pride. Some of it has to do with not being able to make the case for Israel, so when it's attacked, we just let it go by. So we're perceived as a soft touch by black racists, and we don't know how to respond to them either.

James Sleeper: As much as we've been talking about how to respond

as Jews to attacks on us as Jews, I just want to underscore an additional point that I was trying to make. Part of my anger about anti-Semitism has more to do with my feeling that nobody is going to come between me and my right to be an American. It may have happened to the Jews in Berlin in the thirties, but what gets my blood up, and what makes me want to annihilate anti-Semites, is the idea that they would want to come between me and my right and my ability to participate in this American experiment.

Martin Peretz: But who's trying to do that, Jim?

James Sleeper: I think that the essence of identity politics and multiculturalism is to undermine the bases for the kinds of things that some of us are trying to pursue. It's not so much in the hurling of anti-Semitic epithets as such, but in that larger corrosion of the notion of any kind of American exceptionalism. It's part of a longer discussion, but it's a point I felt compelled to underscore.

Stanley Crouch: What you've said is very important. Last night I was thinking I would try to write something like, "Well, who is the Jew, finally?" Is the Jew Hank Greenberg or is the Jew Woody Allen? Is the Jew Meyer Lansky or is the Jew Saul Bellow? Is the Jew Susan Sontag, who writes as though the United States never existed? Is it Cynthia Ozick? And I kept thinking, and the list kept getting longer and longer, of all these people: the Russian-Jewish composers who went to Hollywood and wrote Russian scores for Western movies, so people ended up walking around humming Russian themes while thinking of horses galloping down from the hills – I mean, who are they, finally? And it came to me quite seriously that there is something about the United States that has changed Jews into Jewish-Americans, and that Jews have changed America into something that resonates with certain elements of the Jewish sensibility. It has much to do with what I called at one time the democratization of the matinee idol. By the time you got to the point ten or fifteen years ago when all these American women said they thought Woody Allen was the sexiest guy in the movies, I mean, hey, something's going on! Something's going on.

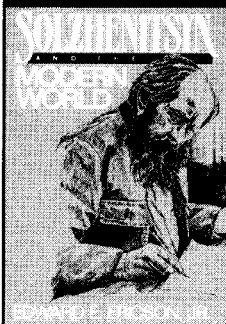
I'm not at all trying to downplay, by any means, the seriousness of prejudice and the ill effects it can have on everybody from the young to the old, but I do think that we have to remember that all of us have made this country something very, very special. All of our rhythms, the best of us and some of the worst of us, pulsate through the spiritual bloodstream of this civilization, and everybody who gets off a boat and comes here knows that. People like the drummer Mel Lewis, who is a

very good friend of mine, a great jazz drummer, told me that when he went to Russia he met people who looked like him and like the people he grew up with, but still there was something different about them. We are all Americans, and we can constantly influence this country to move closer and closer to the highest aspects of its ideals. We're going to be disappointed many times, we're going to be betrayed, et cetera, but I think we're going to win. We've been able to influence this country the way we have because we're tough, and we've got something to offer.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Thank you all for coming and for your contributions. Let's hope the dialogue we've started here will continue.

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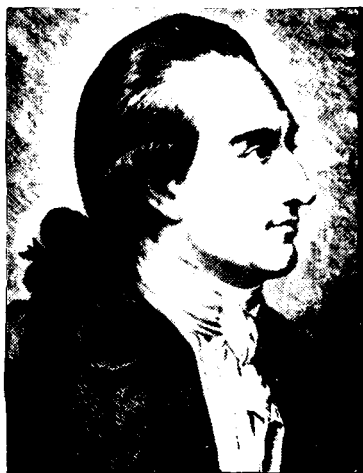
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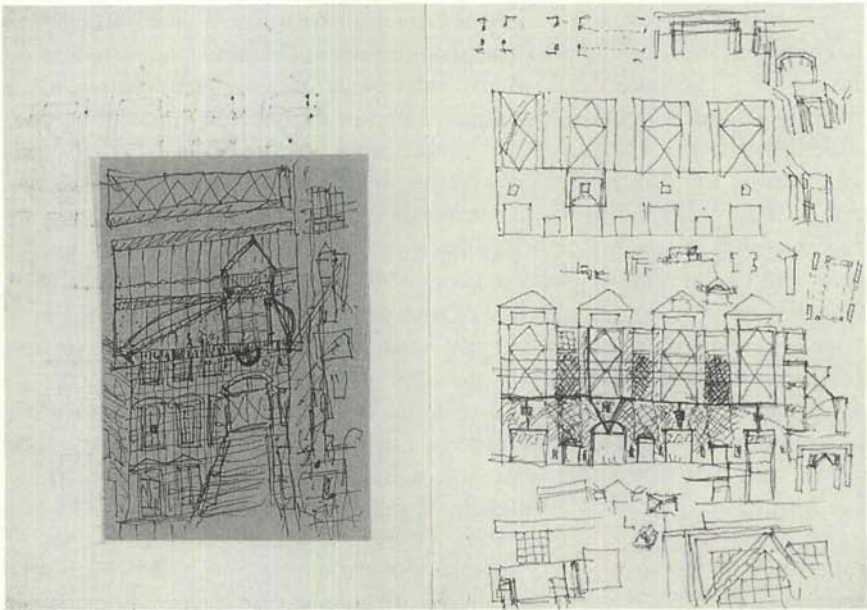
The Holocaust Memorial Museum

I felt there had to be a way of making a building talk. How to do it? How to develop a whole architecture out of it? I suggested it be done tectonically. If you look at an oven, there are ways of building it which lead to a certain kind of artifact, and the artifact is very important to me. In the camps, they used a very direct, straightforward way of putting on a door. Having been trained at the Illinois Institute of Technology, I recognized that way of putting steel together as having grown out of the Industrial Revolution. There is a way of making the tectonics of this industrial technology very elegant. I didn't want to display this elegance, yet I did want to understand it. There was an aspect of technology involved in the Holocaust, and it really defied the imagination to think that the state policy was to absolutely do away with a people, and to redefine how these people would be recognized. The "Arbeit Macht Frei" gate at Auschwitz, for example, was part of the whole discipline that the Nazis observed of trying to make everything invisible until the very end.

Dachau, established in 1933, was the first of the concentration camps, where the ground rules for how to run a concentration camp were established. An immense number of people were there. The images of Dachau that stuck with me were in no way directly translated into the Museum building, because I had one overriding goal: I did not want the building to be a "theme park," a replication of the Holocaust. When working out a museum such as this one, there is always the question of the container and the contained: the building is a container, but it is a container that is much more related to the contained than most other containers. The Museum had to be something that partook of the flesh and blood of the Holocaust somehow, somewhere, but not directly visible.

I wanted to be able to work directly with real materials to make a building that would be more than just a memorial, more than just a monument. I felt strongly very early on that one could not build a memorial which would be simply a sculpture. In my opinion, that would not carry any message. Memorials are things where you memorialize

Editor's Note: This essay was first presented as a lecture at the Architecture League, New York City, in the fall of 1993.



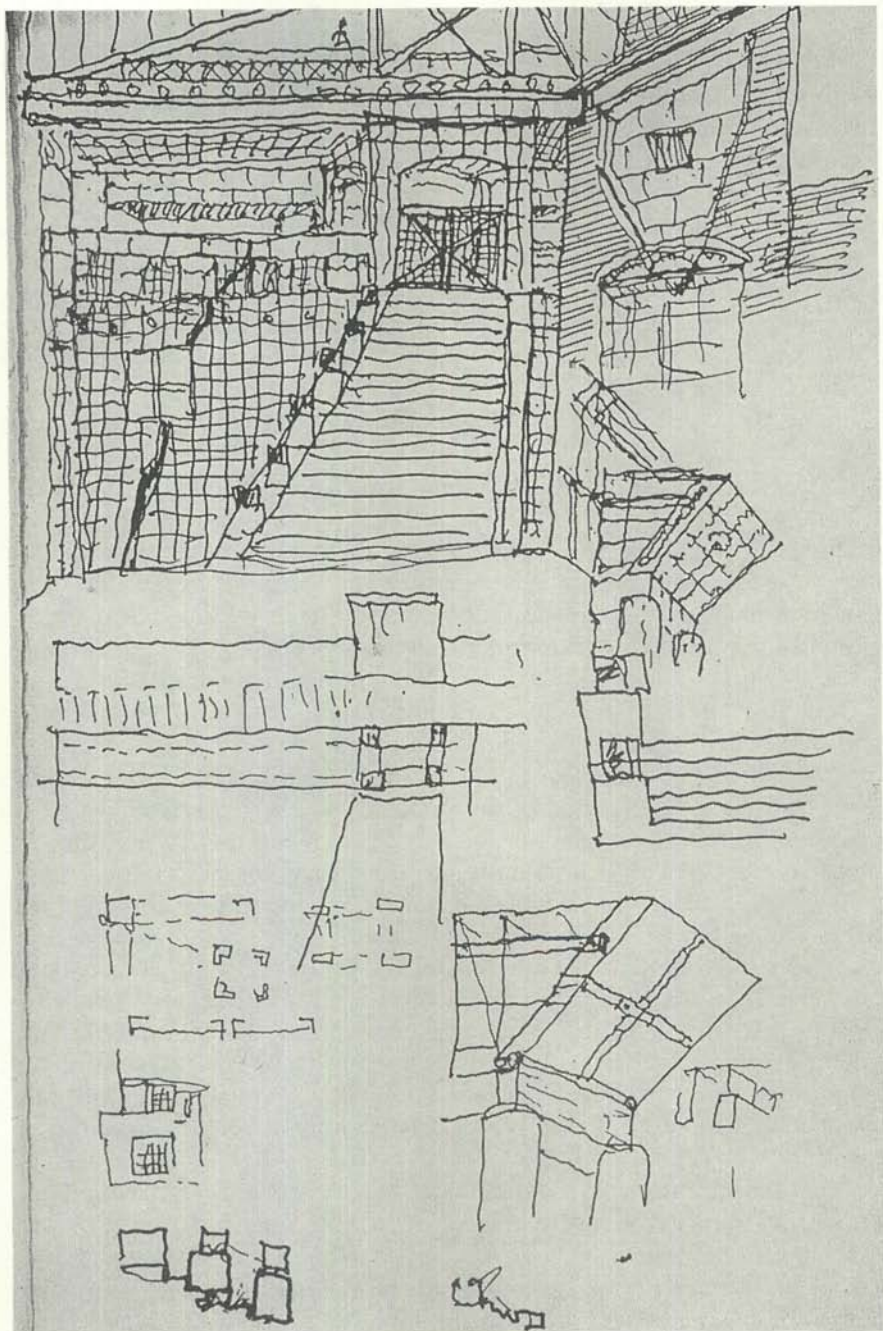
Sketch for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum by James Ingo Freed.
Courtesy of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners.

people who are no longer there. They speak of death; they speak of loss. If you do only this with a memorial, it will in the long run have no impact in Washington or anyplace else. So I thought from the very beginning that the memorial had to be a part of a living complex, an institute as well as a memorial, the institute being the living part. It had to have libraries, theaters, amphitheaters, a research branch, a learning center.

I want to quote something from a critique of the architecture by Adrian Dannatt: "The building is not symbolic. It is suggestive. And it is a distillation of other things. And the range of its suggestions is wide, so it may appear merely as a decorous container to some, a cruel processing machine to others, a bland civic monument and a simultaneous horror show." In other words, I'm not interested in providing you with a metaphor, and a map to the metaphor, and a sort of maze that you walk through and then say, "Is this the right way to see it? Is this what you want it to look like? Is this what you want it to be?" No, the intent is that the building be a resonator of your own imagery, of your own memory. A resonator brings back your thoughts; you feed it, and it feeds you back precisely because there is no such thing as a memorial that *maintains* its meaning. Meanings of memorials change radically, and you have to accept that; otherwise you soon find that you've done something that is kitsch, that loses its power.

I was very much concerned that the front of the Museum, on 14th Street, be part of official Washington, but not entirely so. The curve is a screen wall, it's not a real wall, and it has Biedermeyer-ish qualities; it also looks like official Washington. It begins to set the stage for what's going to happen when you enter. There are two ways of doing so. If you come with a group you enter one way; if you come independently you enter the other way. And then you go out on a stage. The idea is that you must choose to go either one way or the other. The Museum is continuous: a bit like the Guggenheim in its downward "spiral," except it's a rectangle. We have about 42,000 square feet of permanent exhibition space. Diagonally across the rectangular main space, we have an angled skylight, forming a hyperbolic paraboloid. It twists, which is important because it tells you that something is amiss.

At this point you see the main staircase, which has been perceived to be a metaphor: I never thought that one would see it as a railroad that goes up to an opening, but if people do think of it that way, that's fine. The stairs lead up to a view of the mall outside, but where you might expect glass you have metal. The inversion is there to limit your sight of



Sketch for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum by James Ingo Freed.
Courtesy of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners.

the outside. This is a building that wants to keep you inside; it doesn't let you look outside. When you're here you have to focus on the words from Isaiah on the wall, "You are my witnesses."

This concourse level has a temporary exhibit at one end, a theater at the far end, a Serra sculpture, a cinema in the middle, and four conference rooms at the other end. But the interesting thing to me about this space is the diagonal, and the invisible force implied by the slot cut in the slab and running along the floor to a brick wall. You always have to cross the slot to enter the Museum. You cross the slot, you cross the twentieth century.

The main space in the Museum is typologically related to the Auschwitz courtyard, but not directly. I decided to use red brick at all times. It's luscious. We mixed different kinds together to get a brick that is both good and yet, when you see too much of it, begins to be slightly ominous. The use of red brick throughout the concourse wall is pleasing, it's tactile, and it eventually is disturbing, because it evokes the simple brick walls of the concentration camp. This was done almost in a compulsive way, because the brick really supports itself, nothing is hung off the wall. Here I was interested in doing something visceral.

As you look at the walls, you find diagonal steel bracing which comes down to arches, carrying the brick above. The brick walls are bound with metal, which not only makes an elegant impression, but it also brings back the binding of the camp ovens: the bricks were held in place against the heat expansion with metal straps. In these straps, there's such a metaphoric play: the constraints of history, the enslavement of a people, the compression of physical torture – which never force themselves on one but linger like a suggestive stain in one's consciousness. And that suggestive stain has to linger there, and you have to slowly begin to be aware that this building is not made to be beautiful nor to suggest any specific, raw evil; it's designed to bring you to that crack in the building which says that it is not what it seems to be at first glance. The ambiguities were necessary because I intended to establish a dialogue about what happens to memory, what happens to invention, when time passes.

It is significant that the exhibits can be reached only by technology, via steel elevators that take you in one direction only (up), and that the exhibits can be exited only on foot, by walking your way around and out of the narrative. Just as the refined technology of modern Germany led to the efficiency and speed of the Holocaust, engineering the worst out of the best Enlightenment origins, it could be escaped only by those who walked out to salvation, across Europe, in the ancient way. Here one circulates in the building by way of glass bridges. The image of bridges became important to me as a means of distancing, for separating



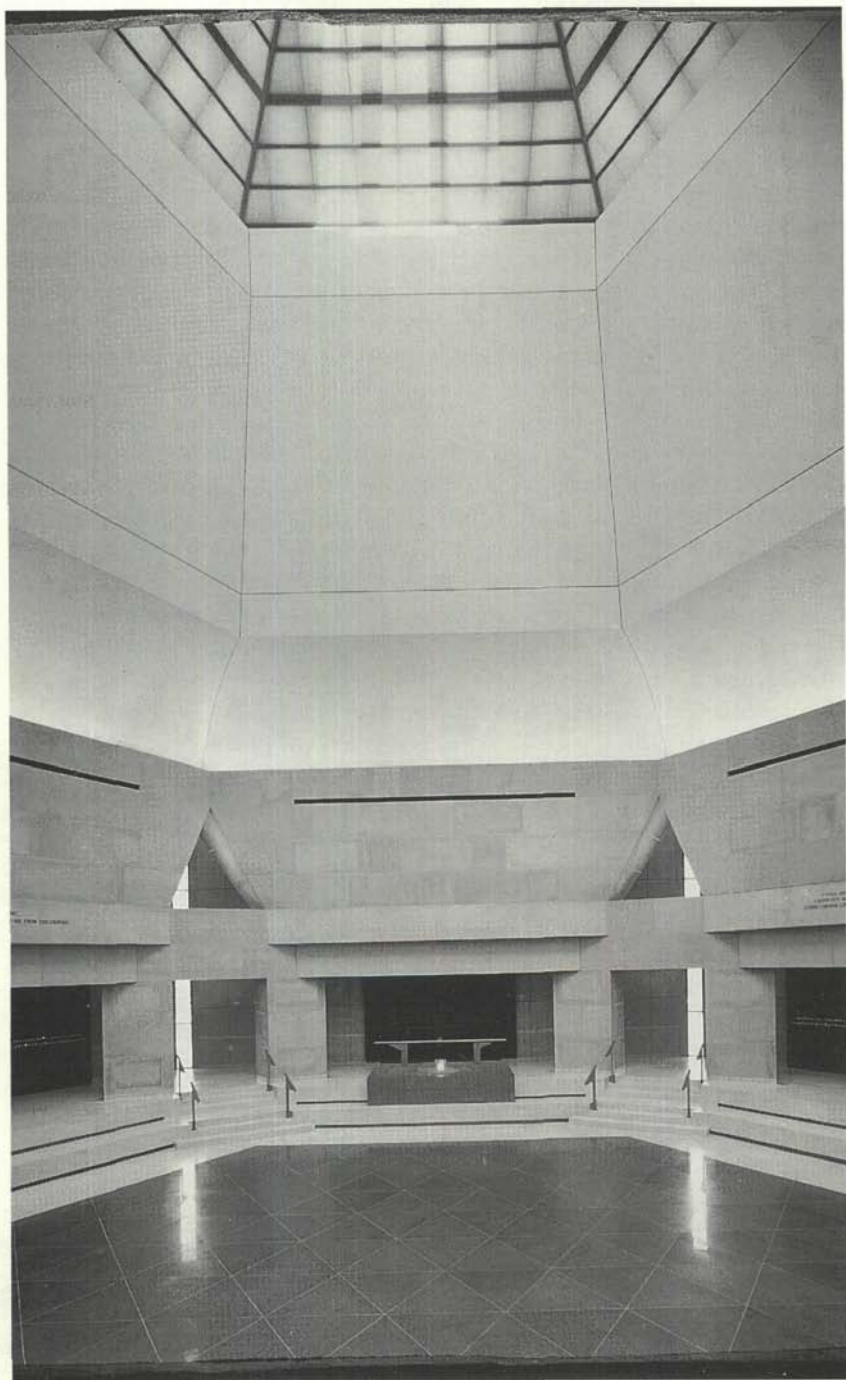
Front façade of the Museum. Courtesy of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

people. Bridges were built over ghettos so that the Aryans did not have to come into contact with the Jews, who were considered a virus in the real body politic. The descent from floor to floor in the building acts as a parable, a version of Dante's rings of Inferno, and also a practical scheme for dividing the Museum's sections. The catamaran structure of the building, the two parallel sections linked by the bridges, implies a variety of bifurcated themes – past and future, Europe and America – and serves as a way of organizing the circulation. The names of lost towns and people inscribed on the glass walls of the passageways prevent the glass bridges from becoming transcendental. Through the glass you can see the twisting skylight, which I conceptualized as a way of looking down at Jonah's whale from above, or as a way of showing the twisting of a culture, but also as a way of building a stiff skylight. The inscriptions prevent these otherwise beautiful structures from serving as cathartic escape passages. There's no way out.

You come across the bridge and you are in an *enfilade*, a row of chambers containing exhibits. Here you come to one of the most moving things I've ever seen: a tower of faces. It's really a photographic record of a little village in Lithuania, called Eishishok, that had been occupied for nine hundred years by a Jewish community. There were apparently at least three photographers in that city. This tower of photographs depicts a whole culture. You see a young man flirting with a young woman, a fire being stirred, people who look like people everywhere. There are no corpses: this is life, and life at its best. It is moving because it is exactly what you don't expect. These 3,500 people were all snuffed out in forty-eight hours when a special SS troop came in. We took out the fourth floor to make this tower go all the way up, and we discovered that the floors get smaller as they go up. So the tower is slightly tilted. It might suggest a chimney; it also might suggest an expansion of perspective. (The design of this installation was done by Ralph Applebaum, who also designed the entire permanent exhibition.)

On the second floor is the Hall of Remembrance. How to make a Hall of Remembrance? What I wanted was not a religious space but a spiritual place. I had several buildings in mind: the Essen Temple, which I saw burn when I was a child; the illuminated interior of the Haga Sophia; the Pantheon, which has daylight coming in at the top; a Jewish synagogue which I saw a model of in Poland; the Baptiste in Florence; and the Tempieta. I also had in mind, most importantly, the tomb of Theodorus in Ravenna.

The Hall of Remembrance has a single skylight, reminiscent of a portion of a giant dome. You see daylight pouring in, in a curious way, just in the middle. The bluish glass around the edges of the dome casts



The Hall of Remembrance. Courtesy of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

what can be seen as a shadow of light. Atmosphere is created from the smallest details. There is a black granite panel at the end of the first axis as you come into the room, the same black granite that is used in the Vietnam Memorial. There are metal shelves holding hundreds of small candles, and grave Biblical text on the walls. There is an eternal flame burning, but it does not act as the center of the room. Rather, it is the empty space in the middle, the polished floor with nothing on it, that draws attention. The granite floor is also like a poppy field – the poppies of forgetfulness. This void becomes the core of remembrance. The void in the middle of the room is the place where those who are not there should have been there. It's the absence of people – the absence of six million. The absence is what we look at. We don't look at anything that's solid. The absence is all, I think, that you can have here.

On the fifth floor, we have four glass bridges which span across its space and are hung from above, so you literally are walking on glass blocks as you cross them. We are back in the Age of Reason again. This is the library floor: four library rooms, four bridges going across, and the archives of the survivors. It is here we no longer have the Holocaust ever-present. Yet looking down from any one of the bridges, we feel that the tsunami-like skylight crashing toward the walls could still overwhelm us.

Jane Alexander Invites Her Troops

When Jane Alexander, the new chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, called the first conference to convene her constituency, ART-21, she knew that she was facing an enormous challenge: to unite not only a diverse and multicultural population, but to navigate among two irreconcilable interests: the proponents of so-called high culture for the preservation of whose art the NEA originally was founded; and the arts activists who long ago had taken over via political coalitions, radical agitation and control over the appointment of decision-making panelists. In fact, prestigious symphony orchestras, major museums and the best ballet companies were not represented at Chicago's posh Hyatt Regency Hotel. They were invited but knew that the deck was stacked against them, and that they loathed, or at least would be made uncomfortable, by the inevitable clamor for funds and by the attacks against what is known as serious art. Still, Alexander forged on to unite all the disparate groups under her broad, new umbrella by "connecting" artists to American society by means of arts education. The "elitists," for whom art is somehow related to meaningful and beautiful experience, perceived this thrust as yet another step into the populism that abroad often has made America the butt of jokes, and that turns art into entertainment. But because an educational mission offers jobs and exposure to artists, in communities and in schools, it appealed to the more moderate participants. Yet it did not satisfy the activists who had come to politicize the NEA even further. They did not want to face the fact that Alexander must make her argument to Congress, and even if Senator Jesse Helms, who occasionally was sneeringly referred to, were no threat to the agency, it was clear from the onset that the Clinton administration is set on moving this gravy train onto the superhighway of communication, onto the road to the "global house" of the twenty-first century.

The meeting itself attracted over a thousand people. Jane Alexander's charm, intelligence and diplomacy dominated, and she was applauded as the potential Lady Bountiful. She put on a good show which easily could have run amok. Her agenda was perfectly orchestrated – beginning with her own and President Clinton's opening remarks (the

Editor's Note: This article was written before the current controversy over the recent grant awards.

latter videotaped and projected onto a huge screen) affirming that “our dedication to the arts will shape our civilization tomorrow.” She kept underlining that we must further all art forms, and that the arts are the best means to unite the country; and she demonstrated her credo with the help of lively performances by Chicago artists and entertainers during meals – which were followed by keynote speakers. Their themes, in turn, were being elaborated during the “breakout meetings” immediately afterwards, and participants were urged to comment and criticize. The writer Thulani Davis led off. With wit and humor, she elaborated on the life and role of “The Artist in Society,” and was “thrilled to be in a room with one thousand artists.”

As I thumbed through my roster of the six hundred-fifty (early) registrants, I found only twenty-five artists, actors and writers. All the other participants were listed as program and general directors, consultants, trustees and executives of arts institutions and museums, of dance and performance companies, of folk and repertory theaters, of art schools and activist organizations, and of governmental arts agencies. Of course, many artists-turned-administrators were among them, and they were representing their constituencies. And the proportion among the latecomers may well have been larger.

The breakout sessions were swamped with overt and covert bids by diverse communities for money from government officials and foundation executives who were assumed to be in the position of handing it out. Thus interests of race, class and gender were pitted against each other; ethnic and regional credos were held up to advance particularistic more than universalistic claims, and representatives of non-traditional art forms produced by computers were clamoring for their own organizations to establish better links to the media – in the process of combining “high” and “media” art – both of which are anathema to “the arts” the majority of participants were representing. In this scramble to secure government money, and jobs, for diverse constituencies, discussions revolved around performance rather than “creative content,” around arts as entertainment and as participatory politics.

In fact, people were recounting their own groups’ stellar achievements. Much of it was laced with jokes and wit. But I began to feel sorry for Alexander: to satisfy everyone, she would need a budget of at least a billion dollars rather than the one hundred-seventy million the government has allotted to the NEA. The comments at mealtimes were more acerbic: a Hispanic woman raised her eyebrows at the quality of a dance troupe; so did half my table when a Mozart piece was amusingly – but wrongly – introduced; and when someone remarked that “there are so few artists here,” another responded that “they have no time, they’re at home working.” Here, the power of arts organizations versus artists

was criticized, although I heard it mentioned, once or twice, in the breakout sessions. Many participants did rally to Alexander's repeated call for her audience to "connect," which set the tone for more tolerance and candor – if only temporarily and superficially. Some people met old friends, and others discovered dissenting soul mates. In her closing address she wisely and bravely stated that all constituencies, even the so-called established ones, were in need of funds and were entitled to a place in the sun – a sun we are expected to soar to on our projected superhighway.

As we know, Jane Alexander has inherited a mess. The controversies over art versus pornography, religious versus secular values, artists' freedom to *épater les bourgeois* versus doing so at government expense have been debated ad nauseum. I won't rehash them. But, as is customary in America, simplistic and political polarizations (unavoidable when politicians are the funders) have helped turn questions of esthetics into political footballs. That this football has been dropped into a playing field which already had been highly politicized by players who either were claiming to be above politics or to get onto the field because they had been kept off for too long, only complicates the issues.

Beginning with the creation of the NEA in 1965, there has been a concerted effort (and success) to bring the arts to the people – in every state and every region of the country. Whether this was done to enrich lives, create jobs, distribute enjoyment and funds, or to provide political leverage for elected officials are moot questions: these priorities shift and, periodically, have induced both philistines and connoisseurs to advocate abolishing the agency altogether. In my own view, taxpayers' money supports all other constituencies, including business, and thus ought to support deserving artists as well; but what we hang in museums is subject to esthetic taste and thus ought to be judged by discerning individuals. Still, in contrast to other countries, which support art without expecting it to improve education, morals, character, job skills, diversity, self-esteem, equal rights, ethnicity, or some other worthwhile cause, discernment as well is based primarily on extra-artistic criteria.

I was able to attend only one of each of the four breakout sessions held simultaneously, but a similar pattern of discourse seems to have emerged in them all. Analogous to what goes on in initial therapy sessions, Thursday afternoon was stormy all around, with controversial presentations and contestations from the floor. In the meeting on "Facing Society's Censure," Nedra Darling began by telling us how she had gone about rediscovering her own (Cherokee) and other Native Americans' histories and how, in the production of a PBS series, these histories had not been properly understood. Brian Freeman, a gay black artist, declared that his talk should have been entitled, "Fears, Queers, and Guess

What, I'm Still Here." At the end of his address, he showed a video, "Engaging in Safe Sex" – in which a hefty and jolly black guy simulates masturbation in front of an audience that is heard laughing and talking but not shown on the screen. Whether it's art or pornography was up for grabs. But it would have been incorrect to call the question. Luis Jiminez, a sculptor from New Mexico, projected some of his public works onto a screen – images of cowboys and Indians he purposely had chosen from pop culture. He advocates social awareness and realism, but has gotten into trouble with some of the politicians who did not like one of his works (his cowboy waved a pistol). He was defended by the ACLU; and he held that "public art should be for the public and paid for by the public." Whereas he felt that this helps raise issues about identity and community, a "representative of the public" asked whether taxpayers have the right to see the art they want to see and to ban what they deem unsuitable for their children.

"We have a right to shock you," was the gist of the many heated comments that followed. (To the one question from the floor about criticism from the "politically correct," Jiminez said a Native American group had objected, and had held up a project due to his depiction of Indians, but this hot potato was dropped at once.) Actually, a number of disturbing questions were raised: one person wondered whether government forces are able to maintain themselves against market forces; another one reminded us that artists might be accountable and responsible to those who sponsor them. But the person who cautioned against elitism won the day, together with the one who perceived "a major attack on critical thinking and multiculturalism." I had a strong and uncomfortable sense of déjà vu when a participant said that "we must look into censorship of the curriculum as well," and when a sex educator declared, forcefully, that she was "queer and lesbian" and went on to tell us to "feel good" about whatever our sexual preference.

At the breakfast plenary session on the following day, Richard Loveless, an artist/teacher who founded community-based media centers and currently works in interactive media and human performance, and in telecommunications, told us that "The Arts and Technology" were the road to the future. On the screen, he demonstrated how, together, they would construct the superhighway of communication which is expected to cast Americans as the landlords in the coming "global house." Stunning, psychedelic imagery, he held, would push new art forms into all discourses, including scientific ones, and would produce the "language of change." Artists, he illustrated, must embrace the novel art processes, and must incorporate digital representation as a new art form, along with metamedia and collaborative projects. Only then will they be "represented in all their diversity of discipline, ethnicity, and culture,"

and with technology accessible to all. But is this art, asked a brave soul at my table.

In the follow-up session on “The Endowment’s Role in National Policy,” Larry Kubota, the director of a multimedia center in Los Angeles, expanded on these aims and deplored the fact that creative artists are trailing the media, the entertainment industry and academia in using advanced technology. To come up to par, he maintained, the NEA must assure them access, support and help create linkages with other organizations and agencies. Priscilla Huston of the National Science Foundation informed us of existing computer networks we might link into, and Dan Mayer, a lawyer, instructed us about the pitfalls of copyright and contract law artists tend to ignore: current problems will multiply with the coming of new technologies. Discussion focussed on how the NEA and its constituents might make use of the projected superhighway which, after all, may replace not only typewriters and current communication systems but the old bandwagons as well. Now, one independent artist declared that artists are less clued in to these advances than teachers and social workers (occasionally these also would be ridiculed), while the representative for “People for the American Way” maintained that “the best reaches the most” (“best” never was defined), and the speaker for a dance group reminded the panelists that they had left out composers. And so on. In other words, each art form offered its own brand of activism and advocacy, one of them even specifying that those who had managed to keep afloat during the last twenty-five years deserved the most support – which effectively would not only freeze out “traditional” institutions but also young fledglings.

During lunch Henry Cisneros, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, talked of “Expanding Resources for the Arts.” He was convincing, alternately citing hard facts and venting passionate feelings that aroused everyone’s sympathy – for the children in housing projects (he actually had spent a night inside the Robert Taylor complex in Chicago and had heard the shots of rival gangs outside). He called upon artists to “tear down the walls that have sometimes put them beyond the reach of many Americans” – symbolically, of course, those inside the ghettos’ walls – and urged them to use their imagination in order to bring American society together again. Quickly shifting beyond both the tawdry and the sublime, Cisneros appealed to the practical: “the non-profit arts industry spends more than thirty-six billion dollars annually and supports over 1.3 million full-time jobs.” As he went on citing where and to whom these funds and jobs are going, he sent a strong message to the politicians – to make them realize that both moneys and work are being distributed to all ethnicities and all states and regions. Artists alone, he illustrated in great detail, have the ability to truly reach

our lost kids – with songs, lyrics, paint brushes, and plastic materials. “At HUD, we see the arts not as an amenity, not as a luxury, but as a necessity in building America’s communities.” What sweet music to every artist’s ear!

I did not attend the panel on “Expanding Resources: New Ideas for Federal Arts Funding” which, essentially, spoke to issues of social activism and public projects, to distributing funds by government agencies fashioned on New Deal-type endeavors, and by private foundations. The session on “Ensuring Equitable Access to Resources” was led off by Helen Valdez of the Chicago Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, who held that covert censorship leads to inequitable distribution of arts funds and that minorities are disadvantaged. June Choi, the Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance in New York, primarily argued that arts organizations ought not set themselves up on business models, and that trickle-down economics are still practiced – in part because issues of race are not confronted openly. Multiculturalism and diversity, she said, must be more than slogans, and must achieve more than getting tokens on Boards: groups reach visibility only when their representatives do their homework, keep on top of fluid situations, and conduct honest discussions. Asian artists are particularly handicapped when people believe they are mentally deficient because their English is poor.

Alan Lomax, of the Association for Cultural Equity at Hunter College, suggested a national talent hunt for the “traditional folk art” that has slipped between the cracks of Fine Arts and commercial arts in the media. He proposed that folk artists be brought into the schools, along with grandparents (their own or others’), to help children find out who they are: with the assistance of a cultural handbook and reeducation of the media, both to be sponsored by the NEA, he went on, it might even be possible to create a national folk arts television network. During the lengthy, spirited discussion, one participant argued for more grassroots experience, another felt that questions of race and class don’t get enough attention, still another pleaded that the NEA not fund cheats (those who don’t pay artists), and there was yet another denunciation of “European Arts” – in favor of “expansion arts” programs. This point was followed up on by the man who said he was funded three years in a row while living in New York but not after he moved to Washington, D.C. and Chicago (had I seen the relevance, I would have responded that I live in New York and usually have not been funded), by a person who suggested that NEA work to simplify the structure of the 501.c3 (tax exempt) procedures, and by a woman artist who thought individual artists are underfunded. I agree. Altogether, commentators, once again, were pleading for their own, mostly populist-inspired causes, and were displaying anti-New York biases.

Ernest Boyer, the last of the keynote speakers, currently President of the Carnegie Foundation and for years one of the country's foremost educators, demonstrated how the arts might help us reach our lost children, our undereducated and wayward youth. His impassioned and upbeat address zeroed in on what this conference was all about, namely to recognize that "we need the arts to express feelings and ideas that words cannot convey" – via writing, music, painting, etc. Children, he went on to elaborate via superb examples, learn to think not only in linear fashion, but intuitively and creatively, and the arts alone "can knit it all together"; they can motivate children who are socially alienated; and they are the bridges that can bring us together.

"The arts are a skill and not a frill in the twenty-first century" began Terry Peterson, Special Counselor to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, and argued they are crucial in our concerted efforts to redesign and reshape our schools, in our reach for higher standards. Elaborating on Boyer's address, he urged us to change programs that have not worked, to advance and improve education at all levels, and to take advantage of the unique opportunity of moving the arts into the schools. Plato Karafelis, an elementary school principal advocated teaching for "meaning and understanding," a change in paradigm for artists' residencies and the application of new technologies; and Edward Gero, an actor and director reiterated all these points, adding however that we now "have a window of opportunity to forge new alliances."

Still, I had a gnawing sense of despair when I kept listening to speaker after speaker recommending participation and outreach – without ever mentioning where all the high goals, and the morals and values we are reaching for, would come from. How would the excellence some speakers kept mouthing emerge from what seemed to be both a wish list of privileged victims, and a focus on the arts as shock troops? My anguish was voiced by a woman who directs a literary program, and who pointed out that literature and writers had been left out of our deliberations, that we must recognize that language and poetry are central to creativity. I felt even more hopeless when a panelist advised her to ask for funds from the National Council for Teachers of English, and no one in the audience took offense or came to her defense. When I finally did, at the end of this last breakout session, I expected to be booed but, instead, was applauded – probably because I said that I was both a professor and editor of *Partisan Review* and thus had to remind the participants that fiction writing is an art, and that actors need playwrights who have a superior command of the nuances of our language. I also opposed the need for yet another formal pressure group for people whose lives

and activities thrive on informality, a suggestion that had come up more than once; and I probably touched a nerve in the silent minority who were upset at the pervasive activist atmosphere. (I found out only later the extent to which literature is the Cinderella of the Arts Endowment. In 1993, literature was allocated 2.8 percent of the NEA's yearly program funds, despite the fact that 16.78 percent of the NEA's applications were for literary projects. Of these applications, 8.4 percent were funded – 228 out of 2,711. Half of that funding goes to writing and translation fellowships, 25 percent to literary publishing, and the rest to audience and professional development and special projects.)

During her closing remarks, Jane Alexander sounded her clarion call, “we must connect,” and expressed hope that we would be able to have art as the glue to bring Americans together once again. By now, even some of the technologically illiterate were ready to join her on the fast track into the future. Optimistically, arts administrators were going home to arouse their multicultural constituencies to get onto the superfreeway – in order to send their diverse messages all over the globe. That some of them don't know where and whom on this globe these messages will reach, the location of many of the targeted countries, or that they purposefully reject the traditions that might link them, was ignored. Nor did it occur to anyone that most of the potential recipients of our outreach don't understand English and may resent expectations to learn our language: no one seemed to speculate on our need to know more about the world we expect to lead. For most conference participants primarily were thinking of the messages they were sending to the Administration, to help themselves by trying to influence Congress. Thus they proposed pressure group tactics, and old methods to enforce new credos, or old ones in new wrapping. At the closing, those present cheered Alexander. But I don't know whether she is aware that there are institutions, small groups and individuals, who have been effectively marginalized by years of advocacy and politicization, and who could help her. Tired of spending their energies in that struggle, they have become disenchanted with the NEA or, even worse, have joined those wanting to abolish the agency altogether. (I am not referring to the customary division between right and left, Republican and Democrat – most artists traditionally vote for the Democrats – but to artists and writers who have given up fighting City Hall, and Congress.)

Jane Alexander faces an indomitable task: to depoliticize an agency plagued by advocacy and infighting, some of whose constituents may appeal to politicians directly – many of whom neither differentiate nor discriminate between the various arts and often don't understand the artistic process. “Alexander the Great” will have to hold together and steer a leaky ship – full of passengers who, in their naiveté, may well help sink it.

Her conference set the tone for changing the NEA's direction, but her ultimate success will depend on strong leadership – of an organization which ever since its start has depended on partisan panelists and experts, some of whose populist and “anticapitalist” biases have ignored quality and content of innovative work, or discarded such criteria as too “traditional.”

I wish Jane Alexander well in her dedication to save the NEA. But we should recall that it bears only a superficial resemblance to the original conception of the National Endowment for the Arts. Maybe it should be renamed the National Endowment for Arts and Crafts, or the National Endowment for Education through the Arts. Education is, of course, the primary means to keep the country competitive in the next century. And becoming skilled in an art form may well help students acquire the discipline to learn other skills, and to move them out of their ghettos. But it is not clear that this can best be done without confronting the negative byproducts of populism and regionalism, which not only ignore artistic traditions and substance, but ultimately also hamper the sought-for “connecting.” Perhaps one solution to the thorny problems this conference revealed is the creation of an Endowment specifically for the arts. One hesitates to advocate the creation of a new governmental agency that may be taken over, once again, by competing groups and interests. But unless we support the best of our museums, symphony orchestras, ballets, writers, artists, literary magazines – as they are supported in all the countries of the West – we will not help the most gifted talents to survive. I don't know whether it might be possible to set up a sub-agency that could be immune to pressure by regional, multicultural or any other criteria which, of course, are indispensable in the political arenas. But I hope that Jane Alexander will have the courage, and the support of enough people in her entourage, to push strongly for the “high arts” – not just for the sake of NEA but for the reputation and the future of our country.

A Year of the Hunter

August 3, 1987. I shall copy out something I wrote in my notebook two years ago, because it is connected with what I observed yesterday:

Marek Zaleski's book, *The Adventure of the Second Avant-garde*. It's exactly as if I were discovering myself in another, distant incarnation. Denial: This can't be me. And yet it is me. Curiosity, because I come across quotes from articles, from letters, that I had completely forgotten I ever wrote. I also discover the logic of my alienation. Just because my slender volumes of poetry, and my colleagues', appeared in editions of one hundred or three hundred copies, that doesn't mean they had that many buyers. In those days I was convinced that we write for perhaps twenty or thirty individuals, for our fellow poets; that belief is returning. Right beside us, thousands are waiting, attentively pricking up their ears whenever a poem mentions politics, poised to adopt us under the condition that we serve the cause. A leftist cause, obviously. On the bottom is the great mass of those who read nothing because they are illiterate or barely literate, the mass for whom television was invented. Somewhat higher, a clear-cut division: On one side, progressivism, leftist inclinations, an openness to innovation, snobbery, a dubious intellectualism, the shifting borderline between Polish and Yiddish (in Wilno, between Yiddish and Russian) – because that entire milieu was eighty percent Jewish. On the other side, right-wing tendencies, ritual Catholicism, an absence of intellectual interests. My fate was determined by a traumatic distaste for the latter camp. Warm, getting warm, in a moment I'll find the key, because I said "traumatic." An intellectual confronting primitives? A Jew confronting goyim? A wise man versus fools? A mystic versus believers in the religion of the folk, in which the Mother of God plays an ancillary role? Unquestionably, alluding to my Lithuanian ancestry was one more way of cutting myself off from my real or imagined arch-Polish persecutors. I am probably being unjust, but I am not interested in a sociological or political analysis of that era. That is how I felt at the time. But

Editor's Note: These excerpts are adapted from *A Year of the Hunter* by Czeslaw Milosz, translated by Madeline G. Levine, to be published in August by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Translation copyright © 1994 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. All rights reserved.

where, in fact, is the key to my trauma?

That whole avant-garde was laughable; a few lost young people, absolutely marginal in the daily life of a couple of university towns, even more so in the life of the entire country. That daily life has vanished: the jobs, the amusements, the loves, the marriages, the births, the undiscoverable stories of millions of individuals. Then a literary critic comes along, and confers reality on what must take the place of that distant real life, solely because it survives in language. Even though it's no longer possible to verify what deformations reality was subjected to in the thoughts and writings of the avant-garde poets, who were probably rife with assorted traumas, just as I was. My imagination conjures up particular individuals who, contemporaneously with me, experienced the world in a totally different dimension than I did, through different ideas and different sensual perceptions.

Isaac Bashevis Singer writes about Poland in the 1930s in his autobiographical *Love and Exile*. I was never in the Jewish writers' club in Warsaw, but even so I had formed an opinion. It was a time when young Jews were leaving the faith and customs of their fathers, not for freethinking and liberalism, but directly for Communism and the fanatical hatreds between Stalinists and Trotskyists that arose out of that new faith. There is no lack of similarities between my alienation and Singer's. The son of a rabbi, he had had a religious upbringing, was already secularized, but was sufficiently complex to perceive the cult of Moloch within the Communism of his fellow writers; he did not get along very well with the Zionists and developed an art of distance in a void: a writer in Yiddish, but for whom? When Hitler came to power in Germany, Singer's milieu was certain that Germany would soon occupy Poland. Singer left for America in 1934 and for many years, as he himself says, he suffered from an inability to write – the logical outcome, it would seem, of a loss that turned out to be providential, because in searching for the ground under his feet he discovered the traditional Jewish world of his childhood. And, most of all, the great metaphysical questions that had preoccupied him since childhood. I, too, during my émigré crisis, searched for the forever-lost country of my childhood. Throughout his life, Singer, whose narrative gift I truly envy, circled around one question: How can God permit so much evil? The Jewish tragedy, Job's crying out on behalf of the millions of victims, is transposed in his work, concealed, although his revulsion at sinful humanity, complicitous in the crimes of Hitler and Stalin, openly erupts in his short late novel, *The Penitent*. The indictment of God, the palpable awareness

of the Devil's presence, belief in Providence – just as in my writing. When I read *The Penitent*, I said to myself that Singer has the same attitude toward Hassidic orthodoxy that I have toward orthodox Catholicism. That is the source of my true kinship with Singer, which is stronger than with any other living prose writer, Polish or American. Nobel Prizes for two alienated men. . . .

August 11, 1987. . . . An artist and an exception to the norm. Since the days of Romanticism we have been accustomed to this link, even to a link with illness; Thomas Mann placed it at the center of his concerns. Probably under the influence of Romanticism, I hit upon the idea of substitute, compensatory activities, but I really have no sympathy for "sick geniuses." Who knows if my ambition wouldn't have been better nourished by ordinary virtues, even if it meant that I would not create a single work?

Mediocrity as an ideal? Because then there are no guilty feelings about one's own existence. In Berkeley, I derive pleasure from being addressed as "Doctor" or "Professor." The satisfaction of belonging to a respected clan, but without excesses, because after all, "one pays for everything," as the devil, the assistant manager of the hotel, says in Leszek Kolakowski's play *Hotel Eden*.

Last night, dinner at the Leonard Nathans' and a discussion about how to phrase one's refusal when turning down an invitation to participate in meaningless performances organized in support of international causes. Decency would require us to give the reasons why we think debates about, for example, how to introduce democracy, tolerance, and peace to the planet are a waste of time. But people like to travel to Paris at someone else's expense, and if they refuse, they prefer to do so politely.

August 12, 1987. Marek prepared the soil and we planted the bougainvillea. It is delicate and doesn't transplant easily. The one that I bought for Nela last year in the old city of Menton was sickly for a long time; it lost its leaves.

So, I am trying to understand my life. I have to confess that my terror of the illness-genius correlation was downright obsessive and it explains many of my decisions. Stubborn, suspicious, stingy, cautious – a real Lithuanian – I was determined to husband my resources within their limits, believing that I would disintegrate if I forgot about my weaknesses. My marriage lasted nearly fifty years, in spite of everything. I chose Janka in order that her eyes, her judgment would govern my behavior,

although I caused her much suffering. And perhaps it was from fear of the dark tide of irresponsibility and madness that I imposed so much discipline on myself, was so accurate, precise, punctual that I could almost be taken for a model baker, scientist, or businessman.

In California at the end of the twentieth century, I, with my knowledge of the hells of Europe, am like Mr. Sammler from Saul Bellow's novel. Also with a certain skepticism toward the privilege that American poets appropriate for themselves, the privilege of being certified madmen. Alcoholism, drugs, stays in psychiatric hospitals, suicide – these are supposed to be the signs of exceptionally talented individuals. America has been thrusting them into this since the time of Edgar Allan Poe. This is possible, but it is also possible that the Romantic myth that identifies greatness with deviance received a new stimulus in the shape of the permissive society and now engenders real, not imagined, results. Whenever Robert Lowell landed in a clinic I couldn't help thinking that if someone would only give him fifteen lashes with a belt on his bare behind, he'd recover immediately. I admit, that was envy speaking through me. If I cannot indulge myself, why should he be free to indulge himself? . . .

September 15, 1987. I read two reviews of Andrzej Walicki's book, *Encounters with Milosz*, in *Arka* [*The Ark*] and Walicki's response. He is right to raise questions about the debates on the Stalin era by people who have no recollection of that period but judge it according to their later experiences. For example, Michnik and his *History of Honor in Poland*. Why be surprised at foreigners' incomprehension when even people who grew up in Poland are unable to appreciate the intensity of the terror in those days? It was not just fear. Those attacks on *The Captive Mind* implying that I had dreamed up some kind of abyss, while what was really involved was simply fear for my own hide, are way off the mark. It was a terror born of the unexpected awareness that the worldwide triumph of Communism was on its way, and that dreams of an independent Poland would have to be placed in a museum. Is that insignificant? And that is why, looking back, I am mistrustful of the noble pronouncements in Jacek Trznadel's *Domestic Disgrace*. Certainly, if there should be a return to Poland-the-martyred-nation, the one from one hundred or two hundred years ago, then such distinctions (here, purity; there, ignominy) would be well founded. I myself have compared Walesa to Kosciuszko. The emotional tracks are worn quite smooth. But to do this soberly? Objectively? One would have to prove that the Stalinist period was only a deviation, followed by a return to our normal condition – but what is the meaning of “normal” in our part of Europe?

September 16, 1987. Those who became Communists in 1945 had all the logical arguments on their side. As for the young writers, even their alternative option was not very plausible. The country was incorporated into the new imperium forever; all one had to do was look at a map. So who could resist it? Those who didn't understand it, who were counting on a new war, on a miracle, and so forth. That's one category. The other was people who disagreed with the atheistic religion of Communism, which, however, assumed a greater familiarity with the Russian phenomenon and a better understanding of it than Polish writers possessed. Not many of them, most likely, had read Dostoevsky's prophetic novel *The Possessed*. Of course, the Catholic populace had an intuitive understanding and it was enough for them to see the marks of the devil's claws. Among intellectuals, those who were religious (Jerzy Turowicz, Hanna Malewska) remained constant in their faith, but that meant accepting the likelihood of martyrdom, which is something people forget about today. . . .

September 19, 1987. . . . My strictness, my defense of discipline, amuses me. As if I conformed. Let's say this expresses my great need for a higher order. In this regard I am Italian or Polish, not American. We have a right to behave swinishly, but there should be that higher authority over us. Rules exist in order to exist, not in order not to be broken.

It seems to me at times that I am a character from a work of fiction. This is a serious intuition; it goes deep. For our imaginings about ourselves, whether written down or not, are a composition. Consciousness is like a law of form. My cat, Tiny, does not dream up any stories about himself. . . .

September 22, 1987. Yesterday Robert Hass and I finished our work on my *Collected Poems*.

I have been looking at texts from around 1950: for example, Konstanty Galczyński's translations of Shakespeare and also of Schiller ("Ode to Joy"), of Neruda and the Russian poets. What a topic: the triumphal Communism of the twentieth century after the victories of Stalin's armies in the years 1942-1945. Aren't they exaggerating today with their hollering about the immorality of those who entered the service of Communism at that time? Also, expressing astonishment at their blindness, since millions were rotting to death in the gulags over there, while here there were odes to joy, enthusiasm for the new life, "the new man"? They ought, instead, to contemplate the fundamental duality of

the written word and of things as they are. Who knows? It may well be that people need permanent duality, in ever changing degrees of intensity. All those poets on several continents – Vallejo, Neruda, Alberti, Aragon, Eluard, Quasimodo, Ritsos, Hikmet – *positive* that they are taking part in the colossal transformation of man into a new, radiant being; glorifying the youth of the planet, enraptured, because they have signed up with the right side, not the side of moribund capitalism. Translations of these poets filled the pages of Polish journals. Polish poets who, in my opinion, at a particular moment honestly believed, who were swept away by the fever of fraternity, of the common march of the best part of humanity: Mieczyslaw Jastrun, Konstanty Galczynski. Galczynski translated this Russian poem for us:

Let song upon song flow on,
let songs echo in every deed
where dream and reality meet . . .

Let song after song flow on,
praising the names of the brave;
song swelling to praise that band
of men who vanquished oppression –
while over them now our Russia
extends her radiant hand.

—Aleksandr Prokofev

An example of the atmosphere of those days. Definitely incomprehensible to the Polish activists in the anti-Hitler underground, who sat in their prison cells after 1945 awaiting the execution of their sentence: a bullet in the back of the head.

Neruda. I remember our meetings, including the last one at the PEN Club Congress in New York in 1966, when I asked him why he had written such disgusting things about me (“in the pay of the Americans,” etc.), and he replied, “Milosz, I was wrong, I apologize.” I don’t know what to think about his fame and the possibility that it will endure. That eloquence, those floods of words, practically logorrhea. . . .

September 25, 1987. . . . Balzac lived during the reign of natural history; he didn’t have to wait for Darwin. In the *Comédie humaine* he wanted to depict the species that make up human society. And he depicted them. During the German occupation we read Balzac passionately because the

brutalized reality that surrounded us made a mockery of noble works and confirmed the brutalized France of the first half of the nineteenth century that we found in Balzac. Obviously, his writing is a model of the realistic novel, etc. Thanks to him we are able to understand a lot about the day-to-day arrangements among people at that time. But, in fact, the *Comédie humaine* is a great fantasy, like Theodore Dreiser's America. True? Or false?

Is hunting and devouring each other the very essence of Nature? It is, and that is why I dislike Nature. Still, I try to keep a distance from our, from my, imaginings. I would prefer not to place an equals sign between our fantasies (even if they are scientific ones) and reality.

September 26, 1987. A recurring nightmare about being late for a train. The city seems to be Paris. The tickets are for nine in the morning. My watch shows five minutes till nine as I ride in the taxi. The next train is at eleven at night. Many suitcases, Janka, our sons, mobilizing all this crowd to get there in time, and once again – too late.

I recall Soviet discussions about Darwinism from the era of the greatest ideological frenzies, when the inheritance of acquired traits (Lysenko) was opposed to natural selection through genetic mutations, and cooperation between animals (based on Kropotkin's theories) to the blind struggle for existence. It may well be that the main goals of that discussion were pedagogical, to ensure a happy childhood (*schastlivoe detstvo*) for the new generation, thanks to the most cheering indoctrination, the furthest removed from reality. Darwinism is too gloomy for that.

I am afraid that I share the views of the most extreme behaviorists. Totalitarian education turned out to be not only possible in this century, but productive. The Pioneers, the Komsomol, the Hitlerjugend, are amazingly similar in their uniforms, their ties, and their inculcation of a deep faith. I am not convinced by assertions that they will never succeed because eternal man will have the last word, because he requires truth, etc. Quite simply, this education responds to real needs of the youthful heart. Children require a harmonious world, one that is painted in bright colors; they love discipline and clearly-given instructions on how to behave. . . .

Higher, or written, culture and lower, or oral. I elaborate on this distinction, which I have borrowed from Gellner's paper at Castel Gandolfo, in the lecture on nationalism that I'm preparing for a conference in Ann Arbor. The impetus for this is Alain Finkelkraut's book, *La Défaite de la pensée*, which I bought in Paris this year. I have also read Isaiah Berlin's essay on nationalism. Political romanticism as the moment

of the transition of the masses from oral culture to a culture inculcated in school. The consumption of one's native literature as "national heritage." Confirmation of this in my own education. Professor Chrzanowski's textbook of Polish literature was the most ordinary nationalistic indoctrination.

What end do we who work in language serve? Is it inconceivable that an aircraft carrier be named *Pushkin*? Or a submarine *Dostoevsky*? Or a spaceship to conquer distant planets *Gogol*? Poor Gogol. He didn't want that. He didn't know. And do we know how we will be used? . .

October 4, 1987. . . . Fascination with the duality of spirit and body, the metaphysical side of twentieth-century poetry. The torment, the bitter remorse expressed in it are most interesting; that is why it has outraced theology and philosophy, which have lost the gift of touching on ultimate things. Within this circle of poetry is meditation on time, the mystery of time – the greatest of all mysteries according to Simone Weil. Everything, probably, that makes poetry similar to pre-Socratic "naïve" seeking belongs here. . . .

October 20, 1987. To look back and recall the titles of one's books, which fill many shelves in their translations into various languages. Thus a miser, often in an agitated state, counts and recounts his thalers. Although, to be sure, "no one knows the paths to posterity" and one must include one's mistakes in the reckoning. Voltaire valued his poetry above everything he wrote, but who today connects his name with poetry? And Boetius, for example, writing his *De Consolatione* in prison, did not know that he would be remembered centuries later because of this writing that he did for himself alone. I do not know what will "remain" after me, as the saying goes. For over thirty years I have been watching the development of *The Captive Mind* into the status of a "classic," helped, to be sure, by Jane's splendid English translation. For me, it was a peripheral product, rather like the theological treatise of a Reformation poet. The same with *The Land of Ulro*. Whether it will last or not is a matter of complete indifference to me, although on one point – this critical test – I am not indifferent: Were we really struggling against resistance or succumbing to a flabby dream? See Jeanne Hersch's *L'Etre et la forme*. Aside from that, the only important thing is the extent to which a person has "acted up" in his field; I did a lot of splashing, I think. "To yearn, to act, and to pass on; the rest is night."

The Captive Mind, painful, written out of an inner compulsion, was conceived in prayer. Were it not for my piety as a child raised in

Catholicism and my capacity to pray as an adult, I would not have known what to do, I would have perished ten times over. On the boundary of prayer, in intense concentration, that is, I was visited on rare occasions, at important moments in my life, with a kind of intuitive clairvoyance when my future would appear to me for an instant. According to Sartre, whoever postulates that the universe is interested in his existence, i.e., that his personal existence has a metaphysical foundation, is a swine (*salaud*). Thus, we are obliged to accept that our foundation is nothingness, the condition of our absolute freedom. Because I believed that I do have a place in the divine plan and prayed for the ability to fulfill the tasks before me, I was a typical *salaud*.

A knight invisibly commissioned to do battle against liars? In *The Land of Ulro* there is a gallery of figures, each of whom assigned himself a place as prophet: Swedenborg, Blake, Dostoevsky, Oscar Milosz. And my disheartened tolerance: So what if human weakness is so great that we are unable to achieve anything without pumping ourselves up with faith in our exceptional importance for mankind?

It is an incontrovertible fact that science and technology transform man from within, changing his imagination. Why should we shut our eyes and pretend, rejecting the obvious, that ancient Rome is again in decline, and this time it's not pagan Rome under the blows of Christianity, but the Rome of the monotheists' God? Since this, and nothing else, is the undeclared theme of contemporary poetry in various languages, obviously this conflict has already crossed the threshold of universal consciousness. We do not know if those who were the opponents of the Land of Ulro, who prophesied a new era of reborn Imagination, were right. Perhaps what will remain will be the one Church of Science and after transitional hesitations it will return to a fundamentally mechanistic orthodoxy. Or new perspectives will open up that are in no way similar to the prophecies of those prophets. But a poet who writes in the language of a country in which the churches are full is not supposed to think about such things. . . .

October 22, 1987. . . . As I followed the fortunes of the Russian, Polish, Czech, and Lithuanian "dissidents" who, beginning in the 1970s, went into emigration either voluntarily or because they were forced out, I felt somewhat envious of them. Because I had the hardest time staying afloat. I was on the very bottom in Paris from 1951 to 1953; Zygmunt Hertz often had to treat me to cigarettes. The Prix Littéraire Européen, Geneva 1953, was the breakthrough that allowed me to bring my family over from America, but our life – first in Bon on Lake Lemman, then in

Brie-Comte-Robert, and later in Montgeron – was always on the edge. It wasn't until 1960 that Berkeley guaranteed our stability. They, however, the dissidents, received honors, fellowships; most important, they were accepted, not treated as lepers like me.

Singer started the series of Nobel Prizes for émigrés. But when I learned of my friends' efforts (Jelenski, Kolakowski), I didn't take it all too seriously because in the past émigrés didn't stand a chance. (Just once, long ago, Bunin.) Nonetheless, the awards have been raining down: Milosz, Canetti, now Brodsky.

The pleasure that I derive from this memoir: along with my old inclination to extract the essence (great events, currents, ideas), this time I am yielding to a fabric woven of specific people, of old and new events, which is, perhaps for this very reason, closer to the tonalities (to fragments) of poetry. . . .

November 2, 1987. . . . On the beach I read an internal German discussion about the history of Germany and its responsibility for the crimes of 1933-1945. They are incapable of seeing themselves from the outside, through the eyes of non-Germans. Thus, the eternal question: How could it be possible? But if they turned into Poles or Russians for even a moment (which they are prevented from doing by a lack of imagination), they would understand a great deal. For Hitlerism was not such an obvious caesura. Both before and after Hitler they have been ruled by contrasts: clean-dirty, respectable-not respectable, light-dark, high-low, cultured-barbaric. The second half of these contrasting pairs began at Germany's eastern border. And even the "final solution" must have originated in their revulsion at Polish, or Eastern, Jews. . . .

November 17, 1987. I try to read contemporary American poetry conscientiously. It's understandable that where there are thousands of poets the overwhelming majority cannot be worth very much, though they provide an incentive and nourishment for the few, just a handful; it's the same everywhere. Something similar is happening in modern painting and the results are similar, too, because the paintings afford little pleasure.

One can say about these poets that their technique is first-rate but that they have nothing to write about. Their "life experience" shows through every line of verse; it is the life of lecturers on university campuses or in high schools, and what they describe most frequently is their family life complications, their own or heard about in the neighborhood bar. It is a common, monotonous reality, free of historical earthquakes; at most, it includes one or two earthquakes in a literal sense. Nothing

drives them to leap like salmon confronting an obstacle. Precisely that, this "having nothing to write about," is, in my opinion, quite a universal problem to be studied. But in the meantime I'll turn to something else.

Oscar Milosz trained me to dislike contemporary French poetry in 1934-35, accusing it of noting down skin-deep impressions, that is, of a passivity of perception. Half a century later, I think he was right. I may once have mentioned, unfairly, my sensitivity to Paul Valéry, when it is Blaise Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire who deserve my homage. But there's little to be gained from the later writers. Either there's a leap or there isn't; that great poem of compassion for the modern metropolis, Cendrars's "Easter in New York," was a leap. It dates from 1912.

Our timidity in the face of incomprehensible sentences and violated syntax gets in the way of evaluation. Many incomprehensible poems and paintings turned out to be exceptional works of art; that's why people are afraid. For my own use, I simply say, "I don't understand," and I don't worry about a given poet's rating on the literary stock exchange. He doesn't speak to me, I don't understand, he bores me, and that's the end of it. I don't have time to dig deep. I assume that there are many levels of incomprehension and that mine is sufficiently refined. Somehow, rejecting a great many poems because of their incomprehensibility has not hurt me, although it's a delicate matter and our profession does not like to admit out loud to such simple criteria, so as not to embolden ordinary people.

Who can guess what convoluted nonsense may be brewing in the minds of our fellow men, sometimes along with deep intuitions? In poetry, various hallucinations have earned the right of citizenship ever since the control of logic disappeared; that is the price paid for novelty, but also, because of it, it is difficult to draw the boundary between exceptional and inferior poetry. . . .

November 21, 1987. In trying to rediscover several years of my life, I shall not avoid simplifications; one month was one way, a second was different, an evolution was taking place inside me. Only the tone was the same: leftist. I did not belong to any party; I had not joined the officially sanctioned Polish Socialist Party; they probably knew about the socialist Freedom organization during the Occupation, but that wasn't an obstacle. One of the first volumes of poetry in Poland after the war was my *Rescue*, which also included poems from the time of the German occupation. My entire system of references was there; in America there was nothing at all. In addition, I was sufficiently intelligent not to confine my observations to the smoothly oiled machinery of democracy but

to make myself aware of the violence of the struggle for existence, the urban poverty, the loneliness of the individual, the fundamental anti-intellectualism of the system. I read a great deal, including Louis Adamic, who had emigrated from his native Lubljana at age thirteen and became in America a writer of the insulted and the injured, workers of Slavic origin. Apparently, alone among Poles at the time, I devoted myself to discriminating reading in English: Henry Miller, *Partisan Review*, and the least orthodox journal of the New York intellectuals, *Politics*, which Dwight Macdonald bankrolled with his wife's money. That's also when I met Dwight. Later in 1955, we took part in a convention organized in Milan by the Congrès pour la Liberté de la Culture. It is he who figures in my poem "In Milan." "Long into the night we were walking on the Piazza del Duomo." Mary McCarthy also participated in this convention. As a result of this reading at least one sector of America became understandable and close to me: the New York left intellectuals of an anti-totalitarian bent. I came across the name of Simone Weil for the first time in *Politics*. Nicola Chiaromonte's articles in *Partisan Review* spoke right to me, although I didn't know who he was. I was pretty well oriented in current politics, both internal American and international. My dilemma, or ours, I defined in this way: "Which is better: to be locked in a cage with an intelligent bandit or with a kindhearted imbecile?" Which testifies to my not very high, and certainly traumatic, assessment of the politics of the co-creators of Yalta. . . .

December 20, 1987. . . . During the interwar decades there was a period when the American Communist Party had a peculiar cure for the "Negro question." It proposed that the Southern states, with their majority black population, should be recognized as Negro states, and that blacks from the other states should be resettled there. The plan was rejected as "un-American"; also, it was too reminiscent of the Indian reservations, of the Trail of Tears when tribes from Georgia and North Carolina, decimated by hunger, cold, and sickness, made their long trek to the territories set aside for them in Oklahoma.

But the plan must have pleased Stalin, who liked simple solutions, smooth and definitive. After all, he transported the entire Volga German Republic to Siberia. We have to admit that the crime of expulsion is contained *implicite* in the division of territories according to the language or race of their inhabitants. Thus, the Poles, expelled by Hitler from the territories incorporated into the Reich during the Second World War, forced by him to move to designated streets in their own cities, were coerced after the war (by fear of deportation) into an

exodus from cities where they constituted the majority (such as Wilno and Lwów) and from numerous regions with mixed populations, and to accept complicity with Stalin's work in the "Western Territories." . . .

December 25, 1987. . . . Recently I read and was pained by a slim volume of recollections and opinion essays about the Paris journal *Kultura*. Must I always be punished for my spiteful stupidity? At the beginning of my stay in Maisons-Laffitte they assumed they had to educate me, so I would open my eyes wide, pretending to be a child, "How can that be? Do they have forced labor camps there?" And poor Zofia Romanowicz, in her recollection of 1951, took me literally.

All this happened a long time ago, and now it's the end of the century and the time to balance the accounts of our century is approaching. Screens, fogs, veils obscure the view and it is difficult to determine where things are, what is more important, what is less important. Anyone who has dabbled a little in the history of literature knows how elusive are divisions into schools and trends, and how mistaken the bestowing of laurels can seem after the passage of a decade or two. Perhaps the ultimate criterion will be the dose of reality present in a given work, demanding allegiance to the truth. Then those books that dispel the fog behind which the monster of Leninism-Stalinism used to hide will enjoy a great rehabilitation. I have observed over many decades how reluctantly they have been received and how quickly forgotten.

In Wilno in the early thirties, one Olekhovich, a Belorussian former prisoner in the Solovki Island prison camp, received from his Polish readers the same reception that Poles who were released from the camps later received from the English public: sympathy, but disbelief, because the witness must have done something wrong; after all, no one is punished unless he's guilty. In those same 1930s, Panait Istrati and André Gide, with his *Return From the USSR*, presented an opportunity for an organized campaign against the disillusioned, the "traitors." Victor Serge, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, and George Orwell were placed on this list immediately; Albert Camus was soon added. The progressive intellectuals conducted a whispering campaign – actually, not so much a whispering as a gesticulating campaign – which was much more effective than defamation in the press. They dealt with those inconvenient writers as they did with the servants of the bourgeoisie: without resorting to words, with an unspoken, mutually agreed-upon system of grimaces, snorts, dismissive gestures.

I could give the titles of books that either were not published or were effectively killed by silence. Also of books that were published in

one language but could not find translators or publishers in any other languages. For example, Józef Czapski's *On the Inhuman Earth* and *Starobielsk Notes*, and Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski's *A World Apart*.

I wrote *The Captive Mind* in what may have been the worst year, 1951, when the Stalin cult in France was at its height, shortly after a totally implausible (from today's perspective) and widely publicized trial. The Communist *L'Humanité* had accused David Rousset, a former concentration-camp prisoner, of referring to the existence of concentration camps in Russia in his book *L'Univers concentrationnaire*. At the same time, Jean-Paul Sartre and Francis Janson were preparing to hurl mud at Albert Camus in *Les Temps Modernes* because of *The Rebel*, in which he makes the same arguments. (I read that book after I finished writing *The Captive Mind*.) Thus, the only suitable word for all that is probably "psychosis." But also "power," fortunately without "police." Sartre's and Janson's articles were simply denunciations, a cry for Camus's punishment. When I was looking for a translator, a young man was recommended to me, a beginning writer of Polish-Jewish descent; he assured me that he would very much like to do the translation but could not, because no one would publish him afterward. André Prudhommeaux, an anarchist who fought in Spain, undertook the job for me. He worked as a copy editor at *Preuves* in Paris. But Prudhommeaux did not know Polish – so I dictated *The Captive Mind* to him in its entirety, sentence by sentence; all he did was correct the style.

December 29, 1987. Writing *The Captive Mind* cost me too much for me to boast about it. That is, it required a series of preconditions: first, my departure from America, because Joe McCarthy was in the process of directing his witch-hunt for Communists, casting a pall of terror over intellectual circles. Obviously, no self-respecting person would join an anti-Communist campaign that was interpreted as the beginning of Fascism in America. The intellectual level of the hunters justified such an assumption. I read somewhere a stenographic report of Bertold Brecht's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee. He played with them like a cat with a mouse. Shortly afterward, he left for East Berlin. The unfortunate Whittaker Chambers can stand as an example of what awaited those hotheads who violated the code of this circle. The long-time editor of *The Daily Worker* broke with Communism because of a real inner crisis and stepped forward as a key witness for the prosecution in the espionage trial of Alger Hiss. From that day until his death he was excluded from the circle of people worthy of having their hands

shaken; he lost all his friends; and his posthumously published letters testify to the depths of his despair. He was firmly convinced that no one understood the essence of Communism and the danger it poses to humanity, and that he, by deciding after a lengthy inner struggle to make a public statement, had lost. Obviously, he had once been fascinated by the Historical Necessity of the Triumph of the Soviet Union. The circles that condemned Chambers consisted by no means exclusively of Marxists and their sympathizers of various stripes; they also included broad circles of liberal opinion united in their enmity toward anti-Communism. "What would have happened if. . ." is always a risky business, but I think that had I stayed in America I could not have written *The Captive Mind* without exposing myself to ostracism by the only circles I could rely on in this country. It was even worse in France, but I had anticipated my foreignness ahead of time, as it were; I would be a leper, I assumed, forever.

In 1954 or 1955, in the lobby of a Paris theater where a Polish play was being performed, I bumped into Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz, who turned and snapped, "I cannot greet you, darling." I was told that Iwaszkiewicz had discussed *The Captive Mind* with Sartre at some meeting in Berlin. Sartre: "It's not enough to be smart, you also have to have *sagesse*." *Sagesse* implies both wisdom and caution. Naturally, I was not cautious. That book trailed after me for a long time. It elicited denunciations by Poles to the American Embassy in Paris (for being crypto-Communist), which meant it wrecked my chances for a visa to America for nine years; it earned me the "mark of a traitor" among progressives; and also, something I didn't at all like, it meant I was considered a prose writer, a scholar in the field of *political science*. *Nota bene*: it did not help me obtain a position as professor of literature; on the contrary.

A second inescapable condition was my pitiable frame of mind. I think a lot about ideology now, about the almost limitless capacity of people to get themselves pulled into a downward spiral from which there is no escape. The "Hegelian bite" can simply be explained by a traumatic experience of weakness – one's own weakness or that of one's country – in relation to a force that is advancing like an iron roller. "Europe is ours." After all, in the years 1945-1950 no one believed in a self-sufficient capitalist Europe. I wrote to extricate myself from that downward spiral. Although only another act of self-therapy, my novel *The Issa Valley* rescued me from abstractions and gave me back to poetry.

December 30, 1987. All people are physically constituted the same way, and thus they can understand each other in their elemental feelings. The

uniqueness of the way good and evil is blended in each individual is therefore all the more astonishing. Exploring my psychology will yield nothing; in any event, I am unable to do it. Especially since there is, of course, a link between *The Captive Mind* and my poem "To Myself in an Album for the Year 1950."

February 24, 1988. It cannot be ruled out that our entire way of thinking about the history of religion demands a fundamental change. Centuries of burning faith uniting the peasant, the artisan, and the theologian, of religious enthusiasm and dedication, may be, to a great extent, the creation of later retrospective imaginings. In many countries the Christianity of the masses of people was dubious and the custom of attending church did not mean that the faithful could have answered the simplest catechism questions. In the sixteenth, and even in the seventeenth, century the Lithuanian countryside was Christian in name only. But even France, which was converted to Christianity so much earlier, had a large urban population in the eighteenth century consisting of poor people who knew nothing about any kind of religion and whose existence explains the fervor with which during the Revolution the heads of the saints on cathedral portals were smashed. Mikhailovsky, criticizing Dostoevsky for his belief in the profound piety of the Russian peasant, argued that the Russian peasant was an atheist by nature. These examples, the first that come to mind, lead to certain suspicions: the history of religion, like history in general, bears the mark of the "learned caste." The splendor of architecture, painting, and music constructed an image of Christian civilization that was to a certain degree above the heads of average people, who are usually preoccupied with their earthly affairs, and it is impossible to draw any clear divisions here, just as one cannot isolate the magnificent temples of Nara and Kyoto from the amazing mixture of traditions that is called Japan. It is possible, then, that the various restraints that have hindered religion in the past (pagan customs, poverty, illiteracy) find their counterpart today in other restraints, so that a general reckoning would end up in a tie.

The "death of God," however, struck at the learned caste, and then philosophy, science, and art went their own way, no longer concerned with the opinions of theologians; and that is a fundamental difference. It is here, in this parting of the ways, that I see the chief problematic of modern poetry.

Poetry in place of religion; summoned, that is, by the same needs that turn man to religion. Such a formula would be accurate, but it is too general and can embrace divergent tendencies. Mallarmé is not the

same as Rilke, and neither of them is the same as Whitman. It would be no exaggeration to seek analogies in the first centuries of Christianity, when, as a consequence of massive layers of intellectual refinement (Greek philosophy, the contemporary scientific world view, etc.), the new religion proved insufficient for the educated, and therefore various types of gnosis became widespread among them. Gnosticism would have been for that time what poetry (which can by no means be reduced to 'aesthetic experiences') is today for educated people. In its most important creations, poetry is an exploration of man's place in the cosmos. That kind of poetry used to find its rival in the many varieties of historiosophical gnosis.

February 25, 1988. Outsiders, people who have not been initiated into the knowledge about literature which has been growing to stratospheric heights in recent decades, must find it quite difficult to understand why everything that used to be part of philosophy has now moved over into literary studies. Or into scholarship that uses literary studies as a pretext. A certain Alexandrianism in writing about writing, the three-storied edifices of formalism, structuralism, deconstruction, etc. The entire realm of writing, along with its contiguous spheres of activity, begins to look like a deadly serious enterprise, quite possibly, in terms of importance, on the same level as Hegelian historiosophical gnosis. Warm, getting warm. And what if one were to study the antagonisms, the collaborations, the rivalries of the two chief callings of the modern era – the social prophet-revolutionary and the artist?

July 22, 1988. Despite its modest beginnings (the novel around 1800 was still not considered a respectable genre like lyric poetry, the epic, and tragedy), the novel matured rapidly and became a "mirror" of customs, of human psychology, of ideas that were in circulation in society, and it even participated in philosophical and theological disputes. The question arises: Is film developing in the same way, from frivolousness to high seriousness, not only competing with the novel, but even trespassing on its terrain, exploring every problem that my contemporaries are pre-occupied with?

Nicola Chiaromonte insisted that this analogy is misleading. I am trying to reconstruct those conversations around a table in the village of Bocca di Magra near Carrara in the summer of 1963. Lots of red wine. All of us motorboating over to the bay with its marble cliffs, where the swimming was magnificent. And those discussions – Nicola, his wife Miriam, Mary McCarthy, Janka, and I. Chiaromonte is one of those

heroic figures of the twentieth century who have to be forgotten so that someday, when just deserts are fairly distributed, their fame will be even greater. He was an intellectual with an honest, independent mind; he understood the totalitarian systems he fought against. He had fought against Fascism in Italy, his fatherland; against Franco in Spain as a pilot in Malraux's division (reading Plato); after the war, against Soviet Communism, as co-editor (with Ignazio Silone) of the journal *Tempo Presente*. I had come across his name during my first stay in America when I read, with appreciation, his essays in *Partisan Review* and *Politics*. Well, Nicola, who at that time was a respected theater critic in Rome, argued over wine that the ambitions of film directors – Fellini, Antonioni, for instance – don't match their intellectual preparation, that in their effort to equal the great writers of the nineteenth century they reveal their intellectual poverty and their susceptibility to social clichés. I remember his harsh pronouncements whenever I go to the movies with the hope of nourishing both my eyes and my mind, only to walk out into the street afterwards with a bad taste in my mouth, a feeling of shame, or simple rage. Such superb technique, such expertise at taking beautiful photographs, and such trash? One might even think that the medium itself, due to the necessity of introducing action to keep the viewer from falling asleep, contains within itself the unmasking of the novel's devices, which are unpleasantly revealed in it, while the writer, working with verbal material, has many other ways of grabbing his readers' attention. One way or another, the characters and their mutual relations lose their multidimensionality. Words, should a director attempt to rely on them, vanish with the passing moment once they are uttered; they do not remain before our eyes as in a book. Perhaps responsibility for these meager results should be placed on financial and social pressures, on the character of a given civilization, or on the selection (artistically *in minus*) of the type of person who is suited to be a director, who has to be too much a man of action, a politician, a financier, for the Muses to love him.

July 23, 1988. "But," someone will object, "film has produced masterpieces."

True enough. But it may well be that these are solely film masterpieces, limited to that medium, and untranslatable into the thoughts and sensibilities that were the strength of the novel in its prime. There have been exceptions, but, nonetheless, a viewer such as I has the constant feeling of the almost limitless possibilities of film that have not as yet been realized. Perhaps the chief contribution of cinema in this century is that its formulations and devices have fertilized literature – both poetry

and prose – quite wondrously, and painting, too.

I have constructed my own imaginary films without being at all eager to write screenplays. There is one film in particular that I watch on my private screen. I am not the only one who knows the first and last names of the people who appear in it. . . .

July 30, 1988. . . . No, I would not want to transfer to the screen the film I have fashioned in my imagination. The more intensely Schiller is present, the more Uminska is a tangible presence, and even Zyznowski, of unknown appearance, the more clearly I see the girls from *Pastoralka*, who today, if they are still alive, are already old women – the more powerfully can I sense the poverty of cinematic devices compared with the richness of human characters and fates. All these individuals exist simultaneously in their various phases, but it is impossible to capture that temporal dimension in linear fashion, in an unfolding plot, despite the ever more frequent use of the flashback technique. Nicola Chiaromonte was probably correct when he denied the possibility of film ever rivaling literature. Fine. But then where are those exceptional virtues of literature? No doubt they, too, are modest. But the impotence of literature when it attempts to capture and preserve reality in words is a separate topic entirely.

CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN

American Identities

Identities, yes. But singularity, as well. Foreign governments having dealings with America in the post-Cold-War period – as in earlier periods – are conscious mainly of having to face a single entity. Not a monolithic entity, indeed, but not, either, some kind of loose coalition of diverse identities. Rather, a complex, highly-structured polity: a Union, the United States of America. This is a trite enough train of thought, I confess, but one should not get altogether out of earshot of it. There is always some danger of losing sight of the obvious in dealing with a vast and complex subject matter.

“Out of many, one.” *E pluribus, unum*. Not a very fashionable idea, but I think one with more life in it than might be supposed. The current emphasis, among those who engage in the discussion of such matters, is on diversity, the multicultural agenda, on race and gender differences, on efforts to downgrade both the English language and standard English in particular. The salience of identities, plural, seems at times so strong that one might think there could be no possibility, any more, of an American identity, a common sense of being American. If this is so, what will become of the Union, that is, of the United States?

Some activists, speaking on behalf of minority groups, have shown a tendency to disparage the whole idea of the Union as irrelevant to their concerns. This is not at all surprising, in view of the record of the federal government and federal institutions regarding what was happening to blacks in the South from the 1870s to the 1950s. But to dismiss the Union itself, on account of that period of occultation, is historically unsound. It was the Union that abolished slavery. It is within the framework of the Union that all later racial progress has been achieved. It is within that framework that what needs to be won can be won. The breakup of the Union into separate states and groups of states would have brought about a certain multiplication of identities indeed, but one which would have been fatal to the hopes of racial minorities and many others as well. So people should think twice before they disparage the Union.

I think the present forms of emphasis on diversity are actually both a

Editor's Note: This essay was first presented at the New York Forum, April 8, 1994.

mask for, and perhaps an unconscious mode for achieving, a unity which would be broader-based and to that extent stronger. For listening to some of those Americans who lay most stress on multiculturalism, I have been struck by the fact that their culture is in fact American, based on generations of American experience and on the primacy of American values and professions.

The relation of racial minorities to their own original homelands and to America is not so different, as is often suggested, from the equivalent relations of minorities of European origin. Few of those engaged with the multicultural agenda know much about any culture outside the United States, and most would be extremely unhappy if they found themselves constrained to live in any of the cultures for which they have a vague, theoretical enthusiasm.

What is really going on, under the multicultural agenda and related enterprises stressing distinct identities, is something more practical and more American than appears on the surface. The real agenda is the enlargement of the American national elite to include groups of persons who have traditionally been excluded from the same, mainly for reasons associated with race and gender. What is in view is the enlargement and diversification of the composition of the future governing class of the United States of America. I hope the expression "governing class," which is certainly not politically correct but which does refer to a reality, will be forgiven.

That enlargement is a legitimate objective, and it is in the interest of Americans generally that it shall be attained, as I believe it will. But those who are in fact doing most to bring about this change do not define their objective in these terms, even to themselves, I think. What I am talking about here is the circulation of elites. As a concept, this is not merely politically incorrect but even perhaps superficially un-American, and it is particularly offensive to the multicultural elite, which is opposed, in theory, to all elitism. Yet the circulation of elites, however un-American it may be as a concept, is part of American society and American history, and what the multiculturalists and their allies are actually trying to do is to remove a block in the way of that circulation: specifically a block to upward mobility by members of their own groupings, including themselves, into the national elite.

At a discussion I attended recently on "cultures," the thought was offered that the distinctive characteristic of American society is "equality." No one challenged this, yet there is some rather weighty evidence against the proposition. America's is an intensely competitive society, in business, in technology, in politics, in sport, and in all forms of

communication. It is a society with great extremes of wealth and poverty, and a huge range of gradations between the extremes; gradations closely monitored and used by those with goods to sell, and, consequently, by the media. It's not obvious that equality is the distinguishing characteristic of such a society.

Yet, of course, one knows what is meant by the point. What is meant is equality of opportunity., not that it exists or can exist, here or elsewhere, in a pure condition. But there is more of it in this country than in most other countries, and it does produce a pleasant social breeziness lacking in other cultures. The breeze is produced by the circulation of elites, not only up and down, but sideways as well. What I mean by "sideways" is that people can move out of their neighborhoods, and the culture of their neighborhoods, and go elsewhere. And this is not the least precious aspect of American freedom.

At the same discussion I have just mentioned, there was considerable talk of ethnic cultural identities, amid a general assumption that these are invariably a good thing. One of those present happened to be a citizen of former Yugoslavia, a Bosnian, and a resident until recently in Sarajevo. She intervened to suggest that ethnic solidarity can be a trap. This thought was dismissed, rather summarily. She was given to understand that ethnicity might perhaps take an ugly turn in backward places like former Yugoslavia, but that it had no such potential in the United States.

I think there are quite a lot of young American students, those living in various ghettos and anxious to get on with studies related to a wider culture, who would not agree. There are some in the ghettos, and among their toughest denizens, who resent such students, quite understandably, precisely because of the upward mobility these students are acquiring. And when the national elite is expanded to include more members of racial minorities, those recruits will indeed be products of the ghetto culture, but mainly in the sense that they have managed to escape from it, generally both sideways and upward.

Two questions arise here, concerning the possible effects on policy of the kind of expanded elite I have been discussing. Will it be more capable of handling America's domestic problems than the current still fairly narrow elite has shown itself to be? And will it be better able to handle America's international relations in the post-Cold-War arena than that older elite has been?

On both scores, I am inclined to return relatively optimistic answers. This is more obvious in the first case than in the second. It is true that white racism has done an enormous amount, historically, to create the

ghettos and their problems. White guilt – a later growth and often mixed, consciously or unconsciously, with white racism – has done little to alleviate the problems. To throw money at ghettos, watch it get stolen, and then shrug one's shoulders at the impossibility of helping "them," pretty well sums up much of the relevant history. Yet it is also true that black demagogues, often themselves on the take, have compounded the damage. Already a black leadership is emerging which is facing the fact that, in the late twentieth century, most of the oppression of blacks in America is the work of other blacks. But the kind of approach with which Jesse Jackson, his assiduous work in the high schools, and his associates are now identified can, if resolutely sustained, do more to help than anything previously tried has accomplished.

In post-Cold-War foreign affairs, I think the implications of a significantly expanded American elite are likely to be benign, though not dramatically so. This development should tend to diminish the self-righteousness in the formulation of American foreign policy, and thereby be conducive to somewhat greater realism in the framing of actual decisions. In this connection Henry Kissinger's new book, *Diplomacy*, is relevant. It is a rather curious book. Its main thrust is against the moralistic, Wilsonian element in the making of foreign policy. To be against this is all right, at least by me. But Kissinger's way of being against it is peculiar and largely unrealistic. He tends to take this stuff at its face value, to exalt it, even to flatter it, as an actual and peculiarly American force in history, quite distinct from the pursuit of self-interest. He tends to ignore the distinction between rhetoric and policy although, as President Nixon's chief adviser, he must know more than most people about that. In fact, neither self-interest nor self-righteousness is either absent from or peculiar to American foreign policy. Most countries tend to combine the two, often without being quite aware of what they are doing. Universally, self-interest shapes most of the policy, while self-righteousness tends to dominate the formulation.

America is not an exception to this law, though Kissinger incessantly seeks to suggest that it is. Thus, he suggests that the Treaty of Versailles was shaped by the ethical and moralistic concerns of President Wilson, as expressed in the doctrine of self-determination. But self-determination, as practiced at Versailles, was simply the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires at the hands of the victorious French and British Empires, to the mutual advantage of the latter, except when one of them saw some advantage in a double-cross, as Britain did with France over the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The moralistic Wilsonian bit no doubt meant a lot to Woodrow Wilson personally. But in terms of in-

ternational politics, it was no more than a way of attempting to make the realpolitik of the Versailles settlement acceptable to the American public.

Wilsonianism is not as important as Kissinger suggests; it is always mostly a matter of formulation, of rhetoric. But especially in conditions of confusion and rapid change, such rhetoric can have dangerous effects on the making of actual policy, leading to excessive commitments, at variance with interests, and then precipitating retreats from such commitments, also damaging to interests and to the stability of alliances in particular. This was evident in the first phase of the post-Cold-War period, at the beginning of our decade. The idea of the End of History and the New International Order blended together in a kind of woozy millennium, *without moorings in global reality*. Democracy and freedom of expression were seen as on the march everywhere, and if they should seem to get stuck anywhere, for a time, America would just give them a good shove and they would get moving again.

That was the mood of those days. Heads were so swollen in the West, among politicians and commentators alike, that feet could be no longer kept on the ground. The mood of 1994 has to be more chastened than it was then, but habitual rhetoric, especially in America, keeps the Fukuyama mood alive, or half-alive, despite what four years of unrelenting historical continuance should have done to the theory of the end of history. The rhetoric, therefore, remains dangerous. The great continuing illusion of the post-Cold-War period is that America, working through NATO and the United Nations, or the UN alone, can convert other cultures into something different from what they are. Examples of that illusion in practice are: the illusion that China can be made amenable to the First Amendment; the illusion that the whole of the former Soviet Union can be made safe for democracy, and safe also from both further disintegration and restored centralism; the illusion that some form of external intervention can eliminate ethnic strife from former Yugoslavia. The most pervasive illusion of all is that nationalism can be made to fade away, yielding place to a new universal order.

The trend has of course been the other way in recent years in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, with the supranational yielding place to the national. That trend in itself, however, is not necessarily or universally irreversible. In the former Soviet Union, for example, we can now discern a centripetal pattern beginning to prevail over centrifugal ones in some places, while interacting unpredictably with them in others. Many groups in the former Soviet Union would rather be in the Russian Federation than subjected to new ethnic or religious masters in

an independent State.

In short, some nationalists can seek refuge from other nationalists, within a supranational entity. Various examples are Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine; Abkhazia, Moldova, and Tadjikistan. In some ways, the processes at work in the former Soviet Union resemble those through which the original Soviet Union was created, under the auspices of Lenin and Stalin, three-quarters of a century ago. Such a trend exists today, but it is a product of autonomous forces, which include the often frantic interactions of nationalism mixed up on the ground. There is very little that Americans, or other outsiders, can do about it all, one way or another. It is unlikely that the outcomes, whether centralized or decentralized, will be democratic or otherwise congenial to American values. It was *glasnost* – freedom of expression – that blew the old Soviet Union apart. It is unlikely that the consolidation of *glasnost* will be high among the priorities of a restored Soviet Union.

Contemplation of what is now going on in the former Soviet Union should concentrate the minds of the United States and its allies on the state of their defenses, rather than on the possibilities of such an unlikely contingency as the indefinite extension of democracy. It is evident from the rise of Zhirinovskiy and other related developments that humiliated nationalism is a major force today in the former Soviet Union. Humiliated nationalism is the most dangerous force in history. More than anything else it gave rise to the French Revolution, the Russian, the Nazi, and the Chinese Revolutions. Its emergence in a dilapidated country still possessing nuclear weapons should hardly be regarded with the complacency which the progress of disarmament in the West seems to register.

In general, post-Cold-War conditions seem to point to the need for a more sober, alert, modest and realistic posture than the present still-inflated state of American official rhetoric yet seems to point to. No doubt the calculations are more realistic, but the rhetoric has a tendency to outrun these. I believe that, in time, if events in the interim allow room enough, the expected expansion of the American elite may have a healthy effect on this. The groups which have so long been left out, even far out, can hardly be quite so complacent as those who have long been in. Racial minorities in particular have been listening to that rhetoric for a long time from the outside, where it doesn't sound so good.

A greater role for women, including black women, in international decision-making could also have a major positive influence on international social priorities, especially in the field of human reproduction. For many years now, the international influence of the United States has

been on the side of the Vatican in deemphasizing the importance, and even denying the existence, of the population explosion. At the Rio Conference on the Environment, for example, the question of population was played down, in comparison with matters of great but still subordinate significance such as the state of the rain forests. The destruction of the rain forests and so much else in the environment is a direct result of the still-continuing population explosion. Yet the United States, throughout the last three presidential terms, has helped the Vatican and other interested parties to block the dissemination of contraception and abortion information.

I believe women may already be beginning to alter those priorities, but the need for change is urgent, and there are small signs of it so far. Most of the great and growing evils of the post-Cold-War era around the globe are connected in some way with this, the greatest of all human problems. South Africa is a major case in point. While most discussion of South Africa's future still tends to center on race relations, problems connected with the population explosion such as mass unemployment, a great increase in violent crime, and destruction of the environment pose greater threats to the future of South Africa than even any form of racism does. By giving a clear, consistent lead on the population explosion, the United States could do far more to help the human race, including the West, than with an indefinite number of well-intentioned but unsustainable – and often counterproductive – local, piecemeal military and quasi-military interventions.

I have noted that there have indeed been small signs of positive change in the attitude of the United States toward the population explosion. As it happens, the largest sign of such change that has yet come to my notice is one reported in the *Wall Street Journal* of April 8, 1994: "Washington is seeking revisions in a U.N. draft document on stabilizing global population growth, with the U.S. hoping to include stronger language on the importance of access to abortion services. The draft is already under attack by Roman Catholics and antiabortion activists."

If the United States maintains its position in relation to that United Nations document, it is likely to find itself in confrontation with the Vatican during the relevant international conferences. This would be a most healthy development and an overdue one. It would lead to an open and sustained debate on this great matter and eventually to a much-expanded allocation of resources toward checking the population explosion. The Vatican, with the aid of the pro-life lobby in the United States, will try to get the Clinton administration to back away from the position it has taken in relation to that draft document. But if the

Vatican fails in that attempt, it will not wish to sustain confrontation with the greatest power on earth. It may not formally change its basic position, but it may cease to lead the obstruction of discussion and action in this domain.

In short, if the United States maintains its present position, the whole climate of international relations, with regard to the population explosion, will change almost overnight, and vastly for the better.

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Saving Haiti

A decade ago I started writing about Haiti, a tragic, little-understood country that was being ignored by the rest of the world. Today Haiti is a tragic, little-understood country that everybody wants to talk about.

One thing that keeps Haiti in the news is President Bill Clinton's critics, who contend that Haiti shows the failure of Clinton's foreign policy. They say this as though his Republican predecessors could point to successes in Haiti. In spite of the dramatic increase of reporting on Haiti, including not only regular newspaper and television coverage but books and lengthy magazine articles, the debate in America seems strikingly uninformed. Congressman Charles Rangel, the Harlem Democrat, has taken a genuine interest in Haiti. But Haiti is a unique and complicated place, and Rangel spends most of his time between New York and Washington. In 1992, after several years of defending Haitian causes, he took his first trip to Haiti. As he was leaving Haiti I asked him what his impressions were, and the portly and dapper New Yorker drew me aside and muttered in his raspy voice, "This place is really screwed up, isn't it."

There is no arguing with that, but almost everything else about Haiti is up for debate. The U.S. special envoy to Haiti, and Clinton's front-line advisor on the subject, William Gray, while listing U.S. interests in the troubled nearby country, stated that one million Haitians live in the United States. This is often said, but it happens not to be the case. The last U.S. census could find only 306,000 Haitians, and even in the likely event that this figure is inaccurate, even a half-million Haitians would be a very high estimate.

The size of the population in Haiti is less certain. For more than a decade everyone agreed to say six million. Since there has now been no census in more than ten years, many estimate that there are presently seven million people in Haiti and well over one million in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. In this town that sprawls between the mountains and the bay, it would be feasible to estimate the number of people who live in the rickety, askew gingerbread relics and fine old mansions on the hillsides, and even in the crowded, steamy downtown where pinkish plastic jugs of embargo-busting gasoline are lying for sale in the ninety-degree sun. But who could ever say how many people live in the shacks built out of scraps, over garbage heaps along the open sewers of the

marshy waterfront – places with names like Cité Soleil, Cité Carton, Brooklyn, and Boston. Peasants leave their failed land and nest there, in keeping with the age-old theory that if you have absolutely nothing the best way to survive is to be around other people who are surviving.

Tens of thousands, or perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people are crowded into this stinking swamp of garbage and human waste. It has become the late-night shooting range of the military regime and its armed supporters. Every night, usually some time after midnight, gunshots are heard in the capital, which is completely blacked out because of the embargo on fuel. Just little pop-pop sounds in the blackness. In the morning bodies can be found. Some have had their faces mutilated with machetes for added effect. Usually a few people are standing around – there are millions of Haitians with nothing to do with their lives – who will explain that these were supporters of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. They probably were. Most of the people in the slums did support him, which is why he won a landslide victory in the 1990 election.

Some of the killing may just be random shooting – true terrorism. A doctor at the grim Hôpital General, where patients die for lack of medicine, said that he was seeing a lot of wounds that looked like they might have been caused by falling bullets that had been shot in the air. In Cité Soleil no shelter is solid enough to offer protection from a rain of bullets. Not surprisingly, the slums are not looking as crowded as they once were. People say that the city isn't safe at night and that anyone with a rural relative would do well to leave town. The population of Port-au-Prince may actually be declining at the moment.

The lack of hard information works much to the advantage of those doing the killing. A few months ago a massacre in the northern city of Gonaïves was reported. The original story came from Haitian journalists opposed to the military regime. The foreign press was escorted around the neighborhood, Raboteau, but saw very little proof of a massacre. At one point an old bone, bleached white, protruding from a hole in the ground, was offered as evidence of the recent killings. An advisor to Haitian military chief Raoul Cedras told me, "It never happened." Although I find the story credible – since it is consistent with what the terrorists have done elsewhere in Haiti – it is also possible that this alleged massacre never happened.

The difficulties in understanding Haitians are compounded by the Creole language, a dialect of French fused with various other European and African languages. Like other languages based on popular dialect – Yiddish is an example – the grammar is stripped down and the nuances

of communication come from the colorful use of metaphor. For example, the lowest level of civil servant in rural Haiti, an assistant to a section chief, is popularly called a *souket-larouzé*, a collector of the dew. I recently heard “eating our fingers” used as a way of saying that there was nothing to eat. That is the way Haitians talk. When Westerners interview Aristide, he seems dreamy and unfocused, but one of the reasons he has such tremendous popular appeal is that he is brilliant at this imaginative Creole style of expression.

The pitfalls in understanding Haiti point to the absurdity of an immigration policy whereby fleeing Haitians tell their stories to U.S. immigration officers who then determine if there is a valid claim of political persecution. If there is not, the Haitian is sent back. While almost twenty-four percent of all asylum requests in the U.S. are accepted, fewer than two percent of Haitian claims are. From 1981 until Aristide's inauguration in February 1991, six of the twenty-one thousand Haitians intercepted at sea were granted asylum. Since the overthrow of Aristide the acceptance rate has increased only slightly.

ABC television commentator David Brinkley summed up the Haitian situation this way: “A bloodthirsty gang of killers who control the people who would leave for Miami tomorrow if they could.” Aside from the obvious fact that Haitians have many hopes for their country other than being able to leave it, Brinkley holds another pivotal misconception: The current rulers of Haiti, albeit bloodthirsty, are more than just a gang. They are the strong-arm side of an entire segment of Haitian society. If Haiti had been a democracy overthrown by a small clique, then reversing the coup would be a possibility.

This is why the focus of Clinton's policy of forcing the current leaders to step down will yield very little. If a deal could somehow be made to bring Aristide back as President, he would be in the exact situation he was in after he was elected. Even if the “gang” that currently rules were removed from the equation, Aristide's enemies, the ones who control all the money and all the guns, would simply wait once more for their moment to overthrow him. What would stop them? If Aristide were brought back through U.S. military might, there would be two options: The U.S. could install him and then leave, in which case he would easily be overthrown as the puppet of a foreign power, or U.S. troops could stay there and keep him in office. Then the troops, the U.S. government, and Aristide would become the objects of hate and the scapegoats for the many ills of Haitian life.

United States policy is flawed in its fundamental concept: the idea that the U.S. can exert leverage on Haiti by threatening the country

with isolation in the form of economic sanctions, and, if that fails, a military intervention. The contorted socio-economic configuration that keeps Haiti oppressed was made possible by its isolation. The oppressors don't fear it. After independent Haiti was established in 1804, the first black republic born out of the first successful slave uprising in the Americas, the Western world decided to isolate it. For half a century no one had relations with Haiti, and in that period its sociopolitical pattern as well as its unique culture were solidified. The entrenchment of voodoo, a religion of African roots that is uniquely Haitian, was the result of the decision of the Catholic Church to join the boycott during those years. The more Washington tries to isolate Haiti, the more Haiti is reminded of its historical roots. The military and its backers increasingly compare themselves to the heroes of Haitian history. They also increasingly refer to voodoo, which is not only a religion but a metaphor as well for Haiti's uniqueness and independence. Clinton threatens invasion, and the octogenarian puppet President Emile Jonaissaint warns that he "has other forces at his disposal."

This kind of language has been adopted by the armed thugs who support the regime. In a downtown Port-au-Prince bar, one wild-eyed man speaks in bursts, his voice growing to a frenzied shout, "We will destroy them! Their skin will explode!" He becomes almost spasmodic as he demonstrates exploding skin. "Pique! Pique! Pique!" He shakes as though silenced by some kind of seizure.

"Yes," says Carlos, a cold-eyed man with the face and reputation of a killer. "Their limbs will fall off. Their skin will break out. I have a lot of weapons." He went to the trunk of his nearby car and returned with what he said was his ultimate weapon, holding at arm's length what looked like a Tabasco sauce bottle with something colorful inside. "This could even stop the air force," he said. He started to open it, contorting his face to brace for something terrible. The other men backed off a little and whispered, "No! Don't open it." Such scenes may seem comic to Westerners, but these men are rehearsing the kind of performance that could win them popular support if U.S. troops are occupying Haitian soil. Isolation, embargo, invasion – these are the forces that have made Haiti what it is.

Aristide supporters like to claim he so improved Haiti that the traffic of refugees fleeing in boats virtually stopped during his presidency. But this is not true either. U.S. Coast Guard figures show that 1,318 Haitians were intercepted in the not quite eight months that Aristide was in power; this is double the number from the same time period under the military rule the previous year. However, Aristide advocates don't need

to distort these facts in order to make a solid case that the brutality of the regimes before and after Aristide was far greater than when he was in power. The Haitian military went to absurd lengths to justify its usurpation of power, even claiming that an examination of the bedside of the deposed president revealed that he had been on medication not only for "schizophrenia and paranoia" but also for "necrophilia." They also claimed to have discovered "voodoo striped" pajamas. Aristide, who had built his mass appeal by whipping his parishioners into a frenzy against the evil, meddling United States, was never well liked in Washington circles. Nevertheless, revelations about necrophilia and striped pajamas did not give much credibility to the anti-Aristide argument. Furthermore it was discovered that a CIA report on Aristide's emotional instability, a report the Clinton administration apparently listened to with interest, came from CIA informants within the Haitian military. Although many have now rushed to disclaim the report, in fact those close to Aristide have always acknowledged that he is erratic and given to bouts of severe depression. I and most journalists who have covered him have seen signs of this. The record also shows a disturbing willingness to tolerate mob violence, and even to use the threat of it to cow opponents. Shortly before his overthrow, he made a speech encouraging lynching by putting burning tires around the necks of victims, saying, "Give them what they deserve," and talking of the "sweet smell" of burning flesh.

According to American logic, it is not enough to work for Aristide's return only because he is the legitimately elected president; he must also be a great leader. In recent months Aristide has been compared to everyone from Charles de Gaulle to Nelson Mandela. In truth Aristide has shown skill neither as a leader, a negotiator, nor a political activist: his one skill is his ability to deliver riveting speeches to uneducated Haitian masses. Yet whatever his deficiencies, it must be remembered that he came to power lawfully and was deposed unlawfully by a junta which ever since has ruled Haiti by terror, the depths of which have not been seen since the 1960s under François Duvalier.

American advocates of Father Aristide, as well as the Clinton administration, speak frequently of "returning Haiti to democracy." But Haiti has never had a democracy. William Gray argues for the administration that Haiti did have a democratic government on that one day in its history, December 16, 1990. But how can democracy begin if the country's rightfully elected leader is not allowed to rule? Ex-President George Bush recently declared publicly what his administration would say only off the record, that support for Haitian democracy does not have to in-

clude support for Aristide. This raises the question: How can Americans such as George Bush talk to the Haitian people about democracy and all the while say that they don't get to have the president who wins the election? The Clinton administration's argument is also flawed: putting Aristide back in power will not produce a democracy. The Duvaliers were fond of claiming that Haiti was not ready for democracy. Of course, they did everything they could to make sure Haiti stayed that way.

Haiti has a very wealthy and very unproductive elite that lives there by stealing its resources. *The New York Times* recently ran a bizarre article comparing Haiti to South Africa, never mentioning the fact that the comparison was between the richest nation in Africa and the poorest nation in the Americas. In South Africa a boycott meant something, because there was something to boycott. A wide range of South African products had to be forced off the Western markets, and the Western nations had to be persuaded to deny themselves profitable trade. A large, successful modern entrepreneurial class was made to suffer. In Haiti one of the few export products is mangoes, which are gathered from single-tree farmers. Mangoes were originally exempted from the embargo for fear that the farmers, lacking the income from mangoes, would chop down the trees and sell them for charcoal, thus contributing to Haiti's already devastating deforestation. My lesson about the elite was taught to me by a Haitian whom I had known since 1985, whose home I had frequently visited. His extremely wealthy family was rarely outspoken, but its members had denounced Jean-Claude Duvalier in his last months. Their conservative but reasoned position was that they were interested in making money. Military rule, violence, and corruption were all bad for business. They wanted to thrive in a Western-style democracy.

After Aristide was overthrown, a fashionable subject both in Haiti and the U.S. was the question of which elite families had "financed the coup." No one seemed to know how much money it would have taken to finance a Haitian coup against a president already hated by the military, but almost everybody had their own list of the families who allegedly had put up money. My friend's name was on most of these lists. This made no sense. He and his family had always been against such things as coups, and this coup d'état was particularly bad for business. But when I asked him about the accusation, he said, "Now I have learned that the people are sometimes wrong." I asked a well-respected businessman how he felt about the coup, and he answered, "After twenty years of struggling for democracy I find that I am not the democrat I thought I was."

A class born and raised in a degree of privilege that is almost nonexistent in Western democracies will not watch passively if its privileges are even reduced. These people will not be persuaded to negotiate away their privileges, no matter what negotiating skills the U.S. or the UN musters.

As for the hungry, impoverished masses who largely made up the sixty-seven percent of Haitians who voted for Aristide (to cite one of Haiti's few solid statistics), at the few moments when they sensed an opportunity to take control such as after the flight of Duvalier in 1986, before the 1987 election and after Aristide's victory, they showed an understandable thirst for revenge, a ruthless taste for blood, and very little interest in democracy. They wanted the chance to become the empowered class and to act the way the empowered class in Haiti always has. Through all of this there have been many remarkably courageous Haitians who have worked for the betterment of Haiti, and many of them have been killed, yet so far no leader has emerged who could moderate the fury of a people who have known nothing for several centuries but abuse, exploitation and cruelty. Aristide always saw this anger as a force to mobilize rather than moderate.

So if invasion won't work, and an embargo won't work, and even a closely monitored and fair election cannot launch democracy, what is to be done for Haiti? Should we despair and agree with the Duvaliers that Haiti is not capable of democracy? If isolationism is the old friend of Haiti's "bloodthirsty gang," then what Haiti needs is to be brought into the community of nations. Here is another Haitian statistic, often quoted, unchanged for years, based on nothing but guessing: Eighty percent of Haitians cannot read or write. They have absolutely no education. My elite friend who found he did not like democracy used to complain to me about how hard it was to teach skills in his factory to adults who had never before experienced the process of being taught. Whenever I fly to the U.S. from Haiti, embarrassed Haitians hand me their passports and ask me bashfully to fill out their U.S. customs forms for them.

Ignorance is the great Haitian conspiracy. In slavery days many planters strictly forbade slaves to have access to education. After the revolution erupted in 1791, it was often pointed out that Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the revolution, was one of the rare educated slaves. Since independent Haiti was established in 1804, most of the country's rulers have consciously repressed education, regardless of whatever speeches they may have offered for its promotion. Under Duvalier, teachers were killed or driven out of the country. After the overthrow

of Aristide, a four-year-old Catholic Church literacy program, run by some of Aristide's closest associates, was persecuted so violently by the military that it was forced to dismantle. If mob violence and class warfare are cited by the elite as reasons to fear Aristide, they also prefer not to talk about his interest in education.

The United Nations, the OAS, and the United States have been trying to get Haiti's rulers to negotiate their own removal. Other goals may be more attainable. An end to the nightly killing and the reign of terror would have to be a precondition to other deals. The international community needs to invest millions – not billions – of dollars annually, not in surplus wheat (which has been the mainstay of U.S. aid to Haiti) to be stolen by the elite, but in education for Haitians through UN-sponsored schools with Haitian teachers educated abroad on scholarships. Such goals are attainable. Fidel Castro brought education to twice that many Cubans. It has not made Cuba a democracy, but it has made Cuba ready for democracy. It is the only way to break the Haitian system, to have a beginning, to create the kind of revolution that can save Haiti.

IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ

One Day in the Life of Contemporary Sociology

Most journals dedicated to reviewing professional books reflect the broad range of opinion within that profession. Eclecticism is the norm: it illustrates the relative stage of development of a profession and serves to protect the profession from parochialism or outright bias. Sociology, which prides itself on being “reflexive” and “self-critical,” is a special case because it reflects a collective mind-set. There is such heavy ideological baggage in the field that we can predict the nature of discussion about a subject – be it urban affairs, demography, or the sociology of knowledge – from the *a priori* nature of the reviewer’s orientation. In consequence, there is little relation of quality to analysis; junk books receive excellent reviews, while excellent books receive junk reviews. All share the mantra of race, class, and gender. Any book that fails to adhere to the catechism of the high priests is castigated. Any reviewer who provides an enthusiastic response to the correct books is assured a warm and comfortable reception, not to mention more such assignments in the future.

An examination of a single issue of *Contemporary Sociology*, the journal sponsored by the American Sociological Association, reveals more than the displacement of sociology by ideology. It demonstrates sociology’s transformation. In the past, whether the framework employed was functional, dialectical, or interactional, there was a common thread of awareness that mere fervor is a poor substitute for intellectual sophistication. But with the rise of demonology, sophistication itself becomes suspect. Instead, there is a blatant assumption that a consensus exists in which good and evil are the perfect equivalents of right and wrong. As a result, the field now operates within a set of unexamined premises about the supremacy of class, race, and gender over other factors such as nation, ethnicity, and religion. This set of presumptions is the fast track to the decomposition of the field.

One might claim that any analysis of a single issue alone of any journal might lead to biased conclusions, but having gone through all twenty-two volumes of *Contemporary Sociology*, I will wager that the comparative outcome would be worse. To select from a full year of

current issues would make the task of debunking easier, not more difficult. Isolating one issue of *Contemporary Sociology* is a solid guide to the weird conditions of a field, but I am willing to be shown that the issue chosen (September 1993, Volume 22, Number 5) is an aberration. As matters stand, a review of this journal of reviews is seriously overdue. It reveals the recently acquired ideological underbelly of fanaticism masked as reflexivity. The informal demand for orthodoxy that binds extremists must be confronted, if sociology has a chance to recover its soul and reestablish itself as the science of today.

Volume 22, Number 5 begins with a symposium on the book by Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *Palestinians: The Making of a People*. The book has been widely recognized, and in some quarters hailed, as a prime example of the capacity of Israelis to understand and appreciate Palestinian history and rights. The singular Israeli reviewer in this symposium, Sasha Weitman, despite his evident sympathies with the book, states frankly that "they wrote it from the Palestinians' point of view." But the editor was able to locate two other reviewers who were less direct: one a Palestinian scholar long resident in Canada, the other a sociologist at Birzeit University, the vanguard Palestinian school in the West Bank.

The results are predictably dismal. Mr. Tamari, while delighted with the authors' recognition of Palestinian national claims, cannot bring himself to utter the word "Israel." For him it is "the Zionist territorial movement, whose settlement policies of native Palestinian land continue to be contested" that defines the "Zionist responsibility for the expulsion of refugees. . . ." Any attempt by the authors to offer a balanced account is simply dismissed as "wavering," an attempt "to be conciliatory [rather] than to establish intellectual rigor in determining what actually happened."

Mr. Zureik is somewhat more sophisticated but takes his cue from Edward Said. He sees the problem of the book as a failure to come to terms with Fanon, Marx, and Gramsci, and yes, "the new school of social history, led by Hobsbawm and Thompson" (as if they were something other than Marxists who write with grace). His conclusion is that the Turks, British, and Israelis were all part of a wave of foreigners whose "expulsion of indigenous leaders" was at least a major factor in "the implementation of brutal policies which thwart attempts at autonomous institutions and land dispossession." This, along with the "factionalism of Arab society," has produced the impasse that, in fact, has now been broken.

Sociology has not produced the sort of dominant American scholars

in Middle East Studies that proliferate in political science and history – figures such as William Quandt, Fouad Ajami, Bernard Lewis, and Daniel Pipes. Mur Zuriack seems more focused on the work of Charles Tilly on the French *Vendee* than on George Homans's classic study of English villagers. Indeed, even Homans's 1964 address to the American Sociological Association, "Bringing Men Back In," is contemptuously dismissed as "amounting to little more than understanding others in terms we understand ourselves." The statement by Sasha Weitman, despite his predilections, at least makes clear that what is at stake is a holy war within sociology as much as a struggle between Israelis and Palestinians.

The balance of the issue bears this out in painful if repetitive detail. In what is billed as a "featured essay," Robert L. Nelson takes on Richard A. Epstein's book, *Forbidden Grounds*. Epstein is perhaps the foremost expert on property and contract law in the United States. Admittedly, to him, the free market is best left to operate on its own, except when it demonstrably is incapable of doing so. Nelson describes Epstein's work variously as "flawed," "unrealistic," "tendentious," "distorted," "surmise," "exaggerated," "badly distorted," and Mr. Epstein himself as a scholar who "seeks to make the existing data fit his theory." Given Mr. Nelson's belief that the current litigious condition of America, while "costly and imperfect," is "worth it," one has to ask just which kettle is calling the pot black. Mr. Nelson seems to want everything free, except the market. No private enterprise viewpoint can pass unscathed.

The follow-up feature essay by Daniel F. Chambliss pits "traditional bioethics," whose advocates remained unnamed and uncounted, against "the social science tradition [which] proposes an alternative model for morality and medicine, one explicitly contradictory to the older philosophical one." The reviewer does make a strong case for various models, essentially a rejection of the psychologizing tendencies of bioethics. But it is not at all clear that medical personnel are less inclined to accept the idea that "decisions are made collectively, not individually," or that "ethical problems are caused by social structures, not cognitive errors," or even that "research should be inductive (empirical) rather than deductive (logical)." The contributions to bioethics are clear and central. But it is less evident that this new approach is dismissed by practitioners. Curiously, the reviewer criticizes the author of one of the three books under consideration, Charles L. Bosk, for his modesty about discovery. The reviewer chastises him for "an astonishing confession from a gifted intellectual, and perhaps overwrought" – hardly the sort of psychoanalysis from afar that one would expect from a devotee of social structural

analysis.

A second segment of the issue is devoted to “Featured Reviews,” which cannot be distinguished from “Reviews” either in length or quality. Here we have a potpourri of books, this time mainly on the sociology of religion. The first review applauds *The Churching of America* for “its tightly reasoned theory of ‘religion economics’,” which states bluntly that “we must view denominations as firms, churchgoers as customers, and religion itself as a commodity that sells only when vigorously marketed by dedicated, innovative and highly accessible preachers.” Is it any wonder that present relationships between religious figures and sociologists of religion are less than cordial?

Next is a book that takes religion seriously on its own and on historical grounds, *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. The reviewer, Mark Juergensmeyer, asserts that “this book’s efforts at explaining these phenomena reinforce the stereotypical Western view of what these movements represent and illustrate the inadequacy of concepts derived from contemporary American experience for doing comparative social analysis.” The alternative, needless to say, is a vision based on “the small group of religious activists” falsely labeled as fundamentalists. Once again, a book that promotes a Western vision or a modernist view is seen as hopelessly out of step with sociology. Curiously, sociology is never assumed to be out of step with the world as described by others.

Martin Riesenbrodt’s knowledgeable and careful review of Ernest Gellner’s book *Fundamentalism, Reason, and Religion* provides some contrast. Here the options among fundamentalism, relativism, and rationalism are taken seriously, and antagonism is something to be overcome rather than celebrated. Indeed, the remaining briefer notices in this segment on the sociology of religion fare better than the long stuff. The reviews by Benton Johnson, R. Stephen Warner, Patricia Wittberg, Andrew Greeley, Jerome Himmelstein, Samuel Klausner, Fred Kniss, and George M. Thomas are fair-minded.

We finally come to the body of the issue – the “reviews” themselves. I am struck by the first implications of the major category, “Social Hierarchies.” Not long ago, sociology had a concept called “social stratification.” But that organizing category seems to have perished in a miasma of political correctness. The shift to a notion of hierarchies is an open invitation to presume not just status differentiation but status inequalities. In fact, every review in this segment presupposes a theory of exploitation underlying the presumption of an hierarchical framework. Social differentiation is assumed to be uniformly the same as class, race,

and gender inequality.

Susan E. Marshall criticizes Phyllis Moen's book, *Women's Two Roles*, by claiming that "relatively little attention is given to employer discrimination, factors which may reasonably affect women's work commitment and assorted outcomes of maternal employment." Johanna van Doorne-Huiskes carries this theme forward in reviewing an edited volume, *Women and Working Lives*. She is disturbed by a finding that the longer a husband is unemployed, the more likely his wife remains in paid work. This allegedly "implies that they [women] are excluded from the protection of employment and labor legislation." C. Matthew Snipp describes a rather innovative effort at studying reservation economies in *Property Rights and Indian Economies*. We are told categorically that "with a few exceptions, the authors know much about political choice theory but very little about American Indians" – despite the claim by one author that he is "now much less hopeful that the Indians will learn anything from us. On the other hand, we have learned a great deal from them." David R. James criticizes Jay R. Mandle's work, *Not Slave, Not Free* for its overemphasis on the plantation legacy argument and for its failure to discuss residential or occupational segregation "as a possible obstacle to African-American economic mobility."

In Paul Luebke's laudatory review of a book called *Common Whites*, it is clear that the author understands "common" as a derogatory rather than a descriptive category. But we are informed by the reviewer that "the book describes the everyday life of common whites and explains why they accepted the slave system." It is never even hinted that some Southerners might have fought for a principle of states' rights and regional autonomy, rather than against freeing black people. Instead, the reviewer sees the common whites in the past as similar to the "white working class culture of the contemporary South." Both express anger, but "rarely are they involved in progressive political movements" (whatever they are). A book titled *The Fortunes of Dynastic Families in Late Twentieth Century America* is critically reviewed by Susan A. Ostrander for its failure to include "feminist scholarship related to its central argument that private family relations are shaped by and embedded in larger public interests and concerns." The identity of this feminist lodestone is, of course, never stated. And the final review in this segment, by Evelyn S. Huber, on *The Power of Sentiment*, a book about Jamaican family elites, perfectly sums up the whole section of the journal in its conclusion: "It is essential reading for any social scientist concerned with understanding Caribbean society in general and the problem of class,

race, and gender in particular.”

The remaining sections of *Contemporary Sociology* continue in the same vein. So I will confine myself to highlights that underline the ideological displacement of sociology by its contemporary practitioners. At times implicitly and other times explicitly, they reveal alienation from and anger at American culture. Indeed, this theme defines the character of so many of these reviewers and of the books they review.

In some instances, the fit between book and reviewer is perfect. Peter Fitzpatrick's *The Mythology of Modern Law* is considered by Jane Collier (in this case from the other discipline marching toward self-destruction, anthropology). Here the author and reviewer share the premise that law “construct[s] bureaucratic practices and market hierarchies as right and normal by defining the cases law handles as ‘aberrant’.” However, no cases are cited, except that the series’ editors say that this entire notion of the universality of law “. . . can be extended to modern sexism as well.” The source of this mythic (read: evil) notion of law as universal is the “Enlightenment thinkers,” who it is claimed “invented the Man of Reason by conjuring up his opposite: the person who was by nature incapable of rational, objective thought. ‘Savages’ were constructed as promiscuous, propertyless, lawless, and unfree, thereby endowing Rational Man, by implication, with morality, property, law and autonomy.” This inversion of intellectual history seems to forget that almost every figure of the Enlightenment – ranging from Diderot to Rousseau – had a love affair with “savages.” It was precisely the freedom of Natural Man that was contrasted with the decadence of Rational Man. This is no place to argue intellectual history, but Mr. Kirkpatrick’s elementary disregard for plain truth is as characteristic of an alienation from truth as is a society that plagues social science with an agenda of race, class, and gender.

Even solid reviews of decent books betray heavy bias in peculiar ways. Carol Mueller, reviewing William B. Hixon’s *Search for the American Right Wing*, concludes with the observation that Hixon’s “cultural modernization analysis is more successful than other recent attempts to provide a comprehensive account of the virulent attacks on communism, feminism, and the civil rights of minorities in the late twentieth century.” In doing so, the reviewer gives grist to the mill for those who see sociology as a mode to confirm the radical character of the struggle for racial and religious equity and, conversely, the respectable nature of communism.

There is some relief. Bruce G. Carruthers offers an outstanding analysis of Robert Brenner’s *Merchants and Revolution*, indicating the central-

ity of religion in seventeenth-century English politics. Deniz Kandiyoti (from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London) reminds Leila Ahmed that “the West” should not be reified and presented as a monolithic category, “when in fact it needs to be unpacked and interrogated just as much as the category of Islam itself.” Believe it or not, in such a context even so tepid a formulation requires courage. Alan Wolfe has a fine appreciation of Philip Selznick’s new work, *The Moral Commonwealth*, praising its author’s ability to be “systematic and objective while also being an engaged advocate for specific values.” This is especially noteworthy and meritorious given Wolfe’s rather different standpoint from the book under consideration. Toby Huff’s statement on Ahmad Sadri’s book, *Max Weber’s Sociology of Intellectuals* is noteworthy for its blunt rebuttal of an assault on Weber’s presumed “orientalization of the Occident.” And there is Maryjane Osa’s excellent appreciation of Adam Seligman’s *Idea of Civil Society*, in which she urges that we move beyond the rhetoric of national self-determination to a recognition “of those political communities that embrace universalistic criteria for citizenship.”

In his brilliant and as yet untranslated book, *Sociology in Germany*, René Koenig sees the process of historical development in terms of the choices and potentials offered by Marx on one side and Weber on the other. It may be a peculiarity of this particular issue of *Contemporary Sociology*, but I found the reviews in the “Macrosociologies” section unusually decent (Weberian) and free of the usual deadening Marxist jargon of most other sections of the journal. These exceptions to the rule of ideology are infrequent enough to stick out, although solid reviews tend to be offered cautiously. They somehow point up the sad absence of a full range of intellectual options and positions that sociology used to provide. (I hope that my calling attention to such a bright spot in a sorry collection does not result in a demand that the section be given a new title and more militant reviewers.)

For example, those working in “urban sociology” seem convinced that every paragraph requires a political pronouncement. Thus Linda M. Labao, reviewing several books on rural poverty and policies, notes the “serious attempt to make social science theory and research relevant and accessible to policy makers. Although written before the presidential elections, the chapters clearly dovetail with the Clinton-Gore agenda.” This is mild compared to the opening salvo by Carole Marks, reviewing *The Great Migration: New Dimensions of Race, Class and Gender*. She declares, “After a period of malign neglect, the Great Migration has received in recent years needed scrutiny from scholars in a variety of disci-

plines.” One never does find out who the carriers of this malignancy have been.

Dudley L. Poston makes an astonishing statement about the work of H. Yuan Tien, the supreme rationalizer of Communist China’s policy of infanticide, sanitizing this murderous practice as “China’s strategic demographic initiative.” The reviewer would prefer a two-child policy “with ample spacing between the children.” At no point does the reviewer deny the right of the state to intervene in regulating childbirth, note the terrible penalty in the murder of female children in particular, or question whether the issue is two children or one child – or simply the rights of individuals to determine their own goals in light of their own sense of domestic economies. All Mr. Poston can say is that this is “a fine book and deserves the attention of sociologists, particularly those interested in population planning and policy.”

By the time one gets to “Life Course,” the ideological bias is omnipresent. The book *Women without Husbands* is reviewed by Peter J. Stein with the following caveat about the author: “. . . her interpretation sometimes lacks such precision, as when a discussion of the many problems faced by lone parents is not balanced by citing children’s positive experiences and the advantages of lone parenting over a conflict-filled marriage. Also absent is a discussion of women’s choices to become single parents, even though such choices are of course limited by class factors.” Not one word about the overwhelming preponderance of men to choose and initiate divorce, nor a hint of possibility that “lone parenting” may be equally “conflict-laden,” and certainly no notion that marriage, like life itself, may simply have to deal with conflict, as it always has.

Jill Grigsby, in reviewing two books on the elderly, throws in a political lifeline: “In recent years, sociologists have not played a large part in public policy.” (It is nonsense. Sociologists were as numerous under Reagan and Bush as they are under Clinton – just different.) This is followed by a more frank statement: “The priorities of the Clinton administration include topics that sociologists can and should address. Our discipline should be adding material to the president’s required reading list.” Had the same comment been made about the prior two administrations, the reviewer would surely have been greeted with a chorus of outraged comments about working for the class, race and gender enemy. Is it any wonder that Suzanna Danuta Walters, in “The Sociology of Culture,” reviewing several books on women and television, starts with an entirely gratuitous statement: “After Dan Quayle upped the ante of election-year rhetoric by railing against prime time’s favorite single mom,

Murphy Brown, academics would be foolish to ignore the significance of television in the media-saturated body politic." Indeed, in examining a book on television news and public life, Charlotte Ryan criticizes "mainstream television" (which one can only presume is a terrible hand-maiden to that more intimate myth, mainstream sociology) for failing to examine "the patient infrastructural work of grassroots social movement organizers like E. D. Nixon and Ella Baker." You don't know who they are? Well, apparently the television camera "missed" them also. And Patricia Bell reviews *Enlightened Racism*, a book which criticizes the Bill Cosby show. In showing positive images of blacks as upwardly mobile, "the images support the notion that America is not racist by feeding widely held erroneous beliefs about black progress." Where has Ms. Bell been for the past thirty years? Or does *The Statistical Abstract of the United States* no longer exist?

Finally, there is the segment "Organizations, Occupations, and Markets." Here Carl Milofsky, reviewing *Human Services as Complex Organizations*, rails against "the growth of male professional organizations." We are told that "as women swelled the clerical ranks, men claimed professional occupations and used masculine imagery to keep women out." Virtually declaring a gender conspiracy theory, he forgets such alternatives as biological adaptation, personal preferences, and familial necessities. But this is mild compared to a review, jointly prepared by David Wright and Heidi Gottfried, of a volume on black women in the workplace. Here, no matter how decent the authors of the book in question may be, "neither engages with the literature on resistance." Once again, all progress by black people is simply viewed as the "mobility myth." One senses a faith by these sociologists in that old chestnut: the worse things are, the better. For sociologists, the better things really are, the worse they will be seen to be.

All together, at least forty percent of the books under review in this issue of *Contemporary Sociology* are on gender issues alone. Vast areas are simply not covered, presumably left for other disciplines to cannibalize. The categories are there, such as demography, criminology, and urban studies. But their relative brevity would indicate that these disciplines have indeed gone their separate ways – and none too soon. Whole areas like education are subsumed (drowned?) in a category called "teaching, research, and reference materials," in which we find mention of a bibliography source book on, what else, *Women in Sociology*, and a book that clearly got lost or shunted from the theory and methods section, *Harriet Martineau: First Woman Sociologist*. This one-sidedness is dangerous to the survival of a profession that, however dedicated to social welfare,

once made its identity and frame of reference clear as something other than a footnote to social work and welfare.

One is tempted to say that the editor of *Contemporary Sociology* must either assume the burdens or at least share in this catastrophic situation. But I think not. Indeed, I am impressed by the Herculean degree to which the current editor has attempted to enlist the aid of non-sociologists in the review process. But no matter who is the review editor, or who shares responsibility for editorial supervision, one needs several hundred reviewers for several hundred books. If a field is so unified in its ideology, so rooted in a shared mission, the editors can do little but moderate and mediate the outcomes. The field as such must assume the burden of responsibility.

For what we are dealing with is a hermetically sealed context, in which external impediments to the ideological agenda within sociology are systematically, if often unconsciously, sealed off. This means that world events that do not fit the model of rigid race, class and gender analysis are ignored. Yet, the unpleasant facts of ethnic warfare, systemic collapse, national identities, and tribal fratricide keep bubbling to the surface. We have a peculiar sociological isolationism – in which so-called domestic agendas simply preempt world events. When that larger world is admitted to the sociological field of vision, it comes as history without currency.

This myopic condition is essentially confined – one would have to say happily – to sociology. There is no comparable situation in any of the other social sciences. Any cursory examination of review media in other areas, such as *Contemporary Psychology*, the official journal of the American Psychological Association, or the large review segment of *The American Political Science Review*, the organ of the American Political Science Association, offers a full panoply of reviewing options. The emphasis in these journals is on quality, not ideology; on coverage not catchism. As long as the converse is the case in the profession of sociology, the field's deterioration will continue. The reviewing media of a professional discipline is a litmus test of the state of a field. When it reflects the state of the world, a discipline is in a healthy state. When it fails to recognize that society has always been a larger category than sociology, it fails to enlighten.

JENNY JOSEPH

Patriotic Poem Against Nationalism

— for a newborn child

1.

Is it too bright for you, darling?
Under the yews in the churchyard
Inland from the town, into the hills, up the lanes
It is cool and green-shadowed and quiet; and there

LYETH the Bodi of Ann David
Who died the 21st January 1784
Aged one month – so born just about Christmas.
And you are two days, born into flaming June.

2

Many the infant children buried here
Beneath elaborate tiles, and graved slate
Polished hard and clean with the lettering
As clear as the day it was done.

Memorials, important, memories solid
For each little scrap of throw-away life
Slate thick and heavy as marble but dimmer
And, absorbing the light, seeming more part of the earth.
The hillside sleeps in the morning sun, in the years
Of sleep that have come to this place.
Beyond the shaded porch-path, out in the field
Light pours unwinking on the bright new graves.

3.

“Genth” I shall call you, who have no Welsh in you.
Little Welsh girl, little scrap born in Wales.
We have no Welsh in us, and I no drop of Celtic.
But I more than you likely to learn these stones
And I, for no reason, more likely to learn this language.

4.

To the traveller
Any place they come to can be home
Even for a day or two
And any language learnt can be our own
For as long as we care to use it; can be
In that we all are strangers somewhere.
Everything we know
We have to learn, even what we are,
Become the part we practice.

You come from wandering people much attached
To places here and there, and fed by roots
(What that lives isn't?) but like water lilies
Floating in moving streams
That take and give back wherever they find themselves;
from people attached to the day
Wherever it fades or opens. The same light
Flowing round somewhere else will make you blink,
As you do now, gossamer, so frail, so silken,
Force you to come to terms, force you to stir.

5.

Later you will get
Particulars: names nationalities opinions,
A history, and be pulled along the track
Your people make to travel on.

Now

It is just life and air and the June sun
Shining by the sea on Wales,
A morsel of flesh and its light breathing,
Gossamer-light for life, durable,
Tough as thistle-down or the fair hair of the dandelions
Seeding to make the inextirpable roots
That fill the banks with flowers.

6.

I drive from dark shadows up into light again
The sun hitting my mirror

Plunged into dazzle of darkness I continue half blind
Until sight settles.
We swing from dark to light to dark, swaying
Between the Poles
We clutch, we scream and you, tiny slip,
Take it all so quietly. You are so calm
Blinking, adjusting, your blood settling no doubt
To pulse at its own speed now, in its separate world.
It has been dark where you have come from
Dark and quiet like the churchyard on the hill
Drowsing in noontide, dark surrounded by light.

7.

Too much is put on children by our wishes:
To carry the banner, to forge and protect the nation.
To make Utopia, which we could not do.
We really should not wish you anything
Except good luck and health and the wit to use them.

But – old ritualist – I want my wishes,
I wish you may
Avoid being mired by the past or the claim of sects;
Not lose the sense of history, but loose
The clutch of the bitter ghosts unsettled people
Feed with acrid blood, as some keep dogs
Hungry on the highway.
It is for such as you who everywhere
Turn to their mother's milk, try out the air,
Move away from the glare, that if we could
We would change nations into geography.

I hope you will love whatever place you live in
Because you love it, not because commanded
By joyless people gritting their teeth for power;
Welcomed everywhere and safe enough
To welcome others and like them for their strangeness.
This is for later, for now
Welcome, strange darling, into this new place
Where you have lighted, soft and quiet as thistledown
To thrive wherever you land, Madog, my girl from Wales.

Books

Althusser's Madness: Theory or Practice?

THE FUTURE LASTS FOREVER. A MEMOIR. By Louis Althusser.
The New Press. \$25.00.

From this lucid and gripping memoir the average American reader would not realize that Louis Althusser, “the world-renowned French philosopher” who murdered his wife on November 16, 1980, was the preeminent theoretician of the Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s, or that he incited the French student revolts of 1968. Nor would anyone familiar with his distinctive and heavy theoretical prose have thought him capable of producing such a lyrical and allusive account of his lonely life. His allusions begin with the title, *L’avenir dure longtemps*, correctly translated as lasting “a long time” rather than “forever.” Is he referring to his future without Hélène Rytman, the life-long companion he had killed, or to the ideal future he foresaw and that took so long in arriving – the dream of freedom in the communist world he had dedicated his life to bring about? (The book consists of the autobiography featured in the title [1986] and another one, *The Facts* [1976], both written before the disintegration of the Soviet Union.) Or has the fact that being declared insane saved him from the murder trial which might well have become a take-off on a Stalinist-type show trial and would at least have touched on the irreparable flaws in his theoretical enterprise? If ever we will get any answers to these questions, Althusser’s memoirs do not provide them.

The casual reader will keep wondering whether Althusser was mad when he kept massaging his wife’s neck until she stopped breathing, or whether the fact that his fingers left no mark on her is an indication that he had planned her death. But the reader familiar with Michel Foucault’s publication of another memoir, *I, Pierre Rivière, having killed my mother, my sister and my brother . . .*, will wonder whether Althusser purposely emulated Rivière who, in confinement in 1831, wrote the tale of the murders he committed. (Rivière had confessed, but the jurors at his trial could not decide whether he had been mad or had committed a crime.) Althusser’s doctors and intimates rushed him into a mental clinic even before the police arrived. Did he get such special treatment because he had been one of the foremost guides of France’s left intelligentsia, or because some of its luminaries at the time of the murder had leading positions in government?

In any event, we now learn that Althusser had been in and out of mental institutions all his life – at least fifteen times, he states at one point – but maybe much more often if we were to add up the separate instances he recalls throughout the book. This fact in itself is not shocking. But it makes us wonder why his friends, and these included communists and fellow-travellers, insisted on keeping their theoretician's state of mind such a closely guarded state secret. (Because Althusser is so brutally honest he ought to be diagnosed as sane. And yet, when he tells us that this "succession of memories by association [includes] hallucinations . . . [as] facts," we have our doubts.)

In the first sentence to the introduction, his former fellow student and neighbor at the Ecole Normale, Douglas Johnson, calls Althusser "one of the most original and controversial of French intellectuals: with Antonio Gramsci he was the most influential of Western thinkers on Marxism." Although this statement is superficially correct, it leaves out that Althusser pitted himself against reformist, humanist and existential Marxists, social democrats and socialists, and that, with the help of a "structuralist" rereading, he promised to discover the "scientific" Marx by focusing on Marx's later works alone. Raymond Aron ranked him as the "second-best" imaginary Marxist, immediately after Sartre. Obviously, "Althusser usually aroused strong feelings," and more so after the killing. However, contrary to Althusser's and Johnson's assumption that the newspapers kept commenting on the killing because it provided food for scandal-mongering, they were inquiring why he seemed to be getting away with murder thanks to powerful friends and his position at the Ecole Normale. Although his general influence had declined, he retained enough of an international coterie which still believed that his allegedly subjectless "theoretical practice" might engender a new universal consciousness.

In 1968, the most radical students had followed Althusser's thought in initiating a revolutionary movement and, soon thereafter, had faced his silence rather than his support. Johnson calls that "the mistake of history," because Althusser "believed that the student movement [that] touched off the general strike should not cause one to imagine that . . . [it] was more important than the workers' movement." He goes on to discuss this point in line with the position then taken by Hélène, and by the officials of the Communist Party – without ever differentiating between history as event and history as the making of the coming revolution, or referring to anything more than "difficulties in the theory." Still, Douglas is insightful when he locates the key to Althusser's impersonal philosophy in the conflicts he had within the Communist Party and

those due to the emotional remnants of his early Catholicism.

Althusser begins the memoir by stating that the precise memory of that unforgettable November morning is forever engraved in his mind. It is a sort of *plaidoyer*, as well as explanation, wish for expiation, and psychoanalytic inquiry into his tortured psyche. His insights into his love and life with Hélène are replete with self-accusations, with reproaches to friends who saw her only as a difficult and abrasive person, as the older woman who induced him to join the Communist Party, who kept dominating him. He asserts throughout that this is far from true, that his victim loved him, helped him and made him emotionally whole, although he recounts the many difficulties in their relationship which could have led those who knew them as a couple to come away with the impression that she was a shrew. When they met, in 1946, they “were two extremely lonely people, both in the depths of despair. . . [and] kindred spirits, sharing the same sense of anguish, of suffering, of loneliness, and the same desperate longing.” They also were poor. Althusser recounts that he was extremely unfaithful, that he flaunted his infidelities, made advances in front of Hélène, and often invited his mistresses to meet her. Yet even though they had many fights over these matters, she always forgave him. A few paragraphs later, he recalls, lovingly, their courtship: “How cheerful and proud I was listening to the sound of my footsteps echoing down the deserted rue Saint-Jacques [after visiting her]. . . . I would not have changed my supreme good fortune, my treasure, my love, my joy, for anything in the world.” One is left to wonder about these mood swings and about whether his friends felt they had to protect him from such swings or from Hélène who, he states, “was infinitely superior to me and did me a favour by introducing me to a world (of communism) I did not know.” But he had “phases of violent arguments with his analyst as well, especially around 1976-77,” the period that coincides with his writing of *The Facts* and of his *Essays in Self-Criticism*; when he apparently revolted against Party discipline.

Althusser does not introduce philosophy, politics and his position within the Party until page 160 of the book. And then he does so parenthetically, with much emphasis on his student experiences with Bachelard, Desanti, Merleau-Ponty and many other luminaries among the French intellectual elite at the Ecole Normale. In this “‘womblike’ place, [he] felt warm and at home and was protected from the outside world.” His doctor and psychiatrist were nearby, and so were such students as Etienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, Régis Debray, Robert Linhart and Dominique Lecourt – all names we are familiar with from the neo-Althusserian works they wrote. He mentions having been influenced by

Georges Canguilhem, having appointed Jacques Derrida. Friend and foe alike crossed his path, leading us to marvel at how internal are the French jokes, intellectual deliberations and rhetoric which years later, outside Paris and shorn of their native idiom, were turned into the theories that have animated much of American academic life.

In the course of this self-analysis Althusser repeatedly states that he does not want to address the contradictions and overdetermination within his theories because he did so in his books. Instead, he “seek[s] to elucidate if possible the deep-seated, personal motives, both conscious and especially unconscious, which underpinned this whole undertaking.” He has succeeded in this task. But that does not mean that, finally, we know whether he was sane or insane at the time of the murder. We do know, however, that he was a better autobiographer than philosopher, whether or not we believe that he wrote about Marx’s economics without having read *Das Kapital*: although he was “not sure whether humanity will ever experience communism” – that is, “the absence of relationships based on the market, on class exploitation and the domination of the state” – he clung to Marx’s dictum that “history is more imaginative than we are.” Altogether, Althusser’s memoir focuses on the personal past: on his literally life-long psychoanalysis; his identification with a patriarchal grandfather; his rejection of parents who were not made for each other; the unconscious reasons for his emotional ups and downs; and the depressive states that so frequently induced him to sign himself into mental clinics. But if the year 1979–80 looked promising because he “resisted the early stages of depression,” why was he suicidal enough to enter yet another clinic in June 1980?

Ultimately, one gets the eerie feeling that not only Althusser’s mental state before and after the murder, but his habits as well, were on a continuum. After Hélène no longer could come to see him, other women friends took her place; and his philosopher friends continued to give him emotional support. Whether or not they will continue to pursue his “scientific Marxism,” or are inventing yet another variant of it, is a moot issue. But we should note that the memoir, in its unacknowledged subjectivity, refutes Althusser’s theoretical endeavor; and that nevertheless some of its components and assumptions are inherent in the current theories of so-called postmodernism which, though passé in Paris, have found their home in our universities.

Edith Kurzweil

Richard Wright in the Library of America

RICHARD WRIGHT: EARLY WORKS and **RICHARD WRIGHT: LATER WORKS**. Edited by Arnold Rampersad. Library of America. \$35.00 each.

I have often had the fancy that there is some one myth for every man, which if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought.

— W. B. Yeats

In a crucial passage near the end of the book that we have heretofore known under the title *Black Boy* (with “A Record of Childhood and Youth” as subtitle), Richard Wright tells of the astonishment and excitement with which, at the age of eighteen or nineteen, he read some of the savage, mocking essays in H. L. Mencken’s *Prejudices* and *A Book of Prefaces*:

I was jarred and shocked by the style, the clear, clean, sweeping sentences. Why did he write like that? And how did one write like that? I pictured the man as a raging demon, slashing with his pen. . . . What was this? I stood up, trying to realize what reality lay behind the meaning of the words . . . Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as weapons, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. Then, maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon.

Wright goes on to wonder, of this brave new world he has come upon, “Who were these men about whom Mencken was talking so passionately? Who was Anatole France? Joseph Conrad? . . . Turgenev, Huneker, Nietzsche, and scores of others? Were these men real? Did they exist or had they existed? And how did one pronounce their names?” Among the twenty-five or so names of European writers that fill out the ellipses between Conrad and Turgenev in Wright’s musings (Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Ibsen, etc.) there is a sprinkling of American ones including Sinclair Lewis, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Edgar Allan Poe, and Theodore Dreiser. This little scene of startled awakening occurs in a rented room in Memphis, *anno* 1927, as Wright, recently escaped from Mississippi and on his way eventually to Chicago, New York, and Paris, warms his dinner – a can of pork and beans – in the sink under the hot water tap.

I don't suppose that in that magical moment Wright, even in his wildest imagination, could have foreseen his own work joining that of Lewis, Twain, Crane, Norris, Poe, Dreiser, and others (including Henry James, who later became for Wright, as he was for James Baldwin, something like the supreme type of literary artist) in "the only definitive collection of America's greatest writers," as the Library of America terms itself. Yet in 1943 or 1944, when he was no longer living the experience but writing it in *Black Boy*, I believe that his eventual place among "America's greatest writers" was more than conceivable to Wright. By that time he was quite sure of it, and therein lies an intriguing tale, the tale of the Yeatsian "some one myth" of Richard Wright's life and his career, his destiny as a man and an artist.

Arnold Rampersad, the editor of the Library of America's two-volume edition of Richard Wright's work, has done an excellent job of choosing books that describe the curve of Wright's career from his apprentice days in Chicago to his international celebrity in Paris. The texts are these: the early novel *Lawd Today!*, finished in 1935 but not published until 1963, two years after Wright's death; the collection of short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children* (including "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," an early sketch of the material that later became *Black Boy*); and *Native Son*, with the essay "How 'Bigger' Was Born" appended, in Volume One ("Early Works"); and in Volume Two ("Later Works"), the questionably – and self-questioningly – titled *Black Boy (American Hunger)*; and Wright's long, existential novel, *The Outsider*, published in 1953. Taken together, they tell Wright's tale, but I think that it takes some sorting out to see just what the tale is and how, or at what level, the different parts of the story are related to one another to accomplish their most effective telling.

There are a couple of strong clues to the nature of Wright's "some one myth" in "How 'Bigger' Was Born," which was first presented as a talk at Columbia University a few weeks after the publication of *Native Son*, two or three years before Wright began to compose the book that the Library of America would have us call *Black Boy (American Hunger)*. In "How 'Bigger' Was Born" Wright tells in detail how he went about writing *Native Son*, the way each day would proceed, the intense excitement and profound concentration that went into "trying to hold within one's center of attention all of that bewildering array of facts which science, politics, experience, memory and imagination were urging upon me. . . . That is writing as I feel it," Wright says, "a kind of significant living." Although his subject matter is in certain ways very different from

Wright's, one nevertheless senses once again the shade of Henry James hovering near the young writer. And when Wright continues, "I tried to write so that, in the same instant of time, the objective and subjective aspects of Bigger's life would be caught in a focus of prose. And always I tried to *render, depict*, not merely to tell, the story," it is easy to imagine that Joseph Conrad has taken up his post along with James behind this man who is writing his way into their midst. Finally, in his account of what writing was for him, Wright says that in *Native Son*, "I wrote with the conviction in mind (I don't know if this is right or wrong; I only know that I'm temperamentally inclined to feel this way) that the main burden of all serious fiction consists almost wholly of character-destiny and the items, social, political, and personal, of that character-destiny."

Alter that phrase "all serious fiction" to read "all serious fiction, including autobiography" (or, better, the reverse: "all serious autobiography, including fiction,") and you have a nicely turned formula that will do very well as an expression of the meaning of Wright's life and his career. When, in the final section of *Native Son*, Bigger is in jail for the murder of Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears, we are told that he "knew as he stood there that he could never tell why he had killed. It was not that he did not really want to tell, but the telling of it would have involved an explanation of his entire life." It is an explanation of Bigger's entire life, an account of his "some one myth," that Bigger cannot himself formulate but that Wright would give us in the fiction of *Native Son*. Even as he gives us Bigger's story and myth, Wright is working through his own myth. Richard Wright's character-destiny surrounds and gives birth to the character-destiny of Bigger Thomas, for Wright was forever writing the story of himself as a writer even as he wrote the stories of his various protagonists.

Black Boy (without *American Hunger* in parentheses now, for a reason to be explained in a moment) is the kernel, the core of Wright's myth and his writing of it; the book is, as J. H. Newman said of his own *Apologia* and as many other writers would say of their autobiographies, the key to everything else Wright produced. The story of *Black Boy*, however, is not complemented by "The Horror and the Glory," which in the Library of America is presented as the conclusion of *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*), or at least not by that alone. In composite, *everything* Richard Wright wrote from *Lawd Today!* and *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son* and *The Outsider*, to *The Long Dream* and *Eight Men* makes up the end of the story. When I say "everything" I mean specifically to

include both *Black Boy* itself and *American Hunger* (the text published in 1977). For *Black Boy* is the sort of book that turns itself inside out to complete itself – to offer proof and confirmation of its own genetic story of the writer in quite the same manner as the other books do. *Black Boy* is distinctive because in it Wright is both protagonist and creator, capable – as Bigger, for example, is not – of giving “an explanation of his entire life” through a written, dramatized – and, yes, fictionalized – recreation of it. As such, it is altogether fitting that a copy of *Black Boy* should have been cremated with Wright’s body and the ashes of both interred in Pere Lachaise Cemetery when the destiny of its author wound to a close.

The story told in the Library of America edition is thus a dual one, the story, on the one hand, of a series of protagonists – Jake in *Lawd Today!*, five different figures in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, the young “Richard” in *Black Boy*, and Cross Damon in *The Outsider* – and the story, on the other hand, of Richard Wright writing. In *Lawd Today!* one can see Wright in the process of learning how to write from such modernist writers as T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and John Dos Passos, all of whom are almost oppressively present in the form of quotations, epigraphs, allusions, and various technical experiments. More or less simultaneous with these discoveries in technique and experiments with his craft, Wright was trying out various themes and motifs that would lead on to his fully mature fiction and to the voice and vision that we now think of as uniquely his. But he came to feel, as he tells us in “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” that he had made “an awfully naive mistake” in the stories of *Uncle Tom’s Children* that had caused him to write “a book which even bankers’ daughters could read and weep over and feel good about.”

In those stories – and this, I think, was the naive mistake – each of the protagonists is almost entirely sinned against rather than sinning, and one can see that their sad fate might easily have drawn the tears of bankers’ daughters. Wright needed much stronger stuff than this and, looking back to *Lawd Today!*, he seems to have realized that he already had it in Jake’s inexplicable, unredeemable, murderous feelings towards his wife. True, Jake doesn’t kill Lil – she kills him – but the killing occurs as he is doing his best to murder her. In *Uncle Tom’s Children* one can imagine that the largely defenseless Lil might have been the protagonist; but now, and in *Native Son* and *The Outsider*, it is the psychology and the logic of the murderer himself that interests Wright. And in *The Outsider* there is further fascination with the possibility of self-murder,

suicide, the quintessential theme of modernist, existentialist thinkers.

There is a good deal of evidence, both internal and external, that Wright was reading T. S. Eliot with close interest in the late thirties, and while one need not insist on any direct influence, there is an eerie thematic similarity between what Wright was doing and these two passages from Eliot. The first is Sweeney speaking in *Sweeney Agonistes*:

I knew a man once did a girl in
Any man might do a girl in
Any man has to, needs to, wants to
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.

In “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” Eliot observes:

In Gopsum Street a man murders his mistress. The important fact is that for the man the act is eternal, and that for the brief space he has to live, he is already dead. He is already in a different world from ours. He has crossed the frontier. The important fact is that something is done which cannot be undone – a possibility which none of us realise until we face it ourselves.

Just as he was exploring modernist techniques, so too Wright was exploring peculiarly modernist themes throughout his career. One can see this in the way he attempts to elevate the realistic narrative of *The Outsider* to a philosophical, conceptual level not only through various meditative passages but, more starkly, in the epigraphs from Blake and Job he chooses to introduce the novel, and his enlistment of separate epigraphs for each of the six parts: from Kierkegaard for Book One (“Dread”); from Hart Crane for Book Two (“Dream”); from St. Paul for Book Three (“Descent”); from *Macbeth* for Book Four (“Despair”); and from Nietzsche for Book Five (“Decision”). This is like a reading list for the person who would aspire to make himself into a modernist writer.

And Wright did it; he made himself into just such a writer, but what is the most particular quality of his writing? Wright, it seems to me, was the most “masculine” (or masculinist, if one prefers that inflection of the term) writer in the American tradition. The words that come immediately and inevitably to mind to describe his writing have all to do with power and strength and force – the compelling power of his narrative

thrust, the riveting immediacy and hold that the dramatized scenes of *Native Son* and *Black Boy* have so richly about them. Wright's narratives are composed of these solid, dramatic blocks of energy barely contained, or not contained at all but spilling over from the page into the reader's life and existence. It is virtually impossible to read, for example, the account of the murder of Mary Dalton and the stuffing of her body into the furnace without that fictional world of the novel becoming, for the space of the time it takes to read it, the real world of the reader. In that overwhelmingly powerful scene, Bigger cannot at first push Mary's body entirely into the roaring furnace; her head, for all that he can do, continues to hang down out of the furnace door. So Bigger

got his knife from his pocket and opened it and stood by the furnace, looking at Mary's white throat. . . . Gently, he sawed the blade into the flesh and struck a bone. He gritted his teeth and cut harder. As yet there was no blood anywhere but on the knife. But the bone made it difficult. Sweat crawled down his back. The blood crept outward in widening circles of pink on the newspapers, spreading quickly now. He whacked at the bone with the knife. The head hung limply on the newspapers, the curly black hair dragging about in blood. He whacked harder, but the head would not come off.

He paused, hysterical. He wanted to run from the basement and go as far as possible away from the sight of this bloody throat. But he could not. He must not. He *had* to burn this girl. With eyes glazed, with nerves tingling with excitement, he looked about the basement. He saw a hatchet. *Yes!* That would do it. He spread a neat layer of newspapers beneath the head, so that the blood would not drip on the floor. He got the hatchet, held the head at a slanting angle with his left hand and, after pausing in an attitude of prayer, sent the blade of the hatchet into the bone of the throat with all the strength of his body. The head rolled off.

I do not mean to say that this is masculine or masculinist writing because the act performed is one of strength, but because the narrative itself has such a highly charged energy and power about it, the kind of compelling narrative power that I can think of in only one other writer, dissimilar as he is in many other ways: D. H. Lawrence. I cannot think of a woman writer with whom Wright can usefully be compared – contrasted, yes, the classic contrasting instance being Zora Neale Hurston. It is very much to the point to remark that women, as fully realized human beings, have very little place in Wright's fiction except as creatures who define the maleness of the protagonist. Consider Mary Dalton and Bessie

Mears in *Native Son*: they are there simply to be killed by Bigger Thomas; or consider the girl named Bess in *Black Boy* who exists, in the mind of the protagonist, the young Richard Wright, as a trap that threatens to keep him in the South, unable to realize his destiny as a writer.

It is not in *Native Son* alone that dramatic scenes are so compellingly realized: *Black Boy* too is made up of just such scenes, from the opening where the young Richard sets fire to his house and his mother beats him almost to death (“But for a long time I was chastened whenever I remembered that my mother had come close to killing me”); to the scene when he kills the kitten by hanging it and is forced by his mother to go out in the dark, take the kitten down and bury it; or the scene of terror on the Mississippi River with his Uncle Hoskins who threatens to drive the buggy right into the water; or the scene of his forced “salvation” in church. No one commanded the sheer power of narrative more effectively than Richard Wright, and the intentional symbolism and philosophical speculation of his later work in particular pales into insignificance beside his ability to hold the reader with a story, his story. To tell that story, Wright had mastered the lesson first encountered in Mencken: “Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were” – and here they are, in Richard Wright.

Now we come to what I take to be the central issue posed by this edition of Richard Wright, namely the versions of the different texts chosen by Arnold Rampersad. We are told on the book jacket copy, “*Native Son* and *Black Boy* are classics of twentieth-century American literature – and yet the novel and memoir known to millions of readers are in fact revised and abbreviated versions of the books Richard Wright wrote. This two-volume Library of America edition presents for the first time Wright’s major works in the form he intended them to be read.” There are a breathtaking number of questions begged in these two sentences, chief among them these: How do we know the form in which Wright intended the books to be read? If we do know this intention, then when was it settled upon? When did Wright intend this form, and did his intention ever change? (For, of course, books go through drafts and revisions and an author can be said to intend it to be read in one form at one time and in another form at another time.) And, perhaps most crucially, is this question of the form in which the author intended the books to be read the only – or even the ultimate – question we have to ask of the form and the structure of a book?

With regard to this final question, it may seem like critical hubris to suggest that the reader is right to usurp the place of the author in deciding the most appropriate form of a book, but there are two responses to be made to this: first, that as readers and critics, we are always judging the relative success of any book or version of a book; and second, that this putative contest between author and reader (or, in another way, between author and editor or author and Book-of-the-Month Club) is not really what is at issue in the cases of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. Wright, in a very obvious sense, did authorize the publication of both books as we have known them for going on half a century now. Moreover, the cases of *Native Son* and *Black Boy* are essentially different from each other, and the sentences quoted from the book-flap not only beg a number of questions, but also thoroughly obscure these differences between the two cases and indeed obscure the whole matter of the best form in which to read Richard Wright.

I think the editorial decision here regarding *Native Son* is less complicated and more easily justified than it is for *Black Boy*. Essentially what the Book-of-the-Month Club asked for by way of revision of *Native Son* was the exclusion of the passage – which has become famous or infamous – in which Bigger and his friend Jack masturbate in a movie theater, after they watch an exceedingly odd newsreel featuring Mary Dalton as a kind of sex object and one of the idle rich flirting with Communism. At the request of the book club, Wright completely rewrote the passage, changing entirely the nature of the film (from a newsreel to a feature movie) and removing all reference to Mary Dalton. This in turn required deleting or altering later passages that refer in one way or another to the movie-house scene. In making these revisions, Wright made other minor changes that might be seen in some instances as improvements to the original version (for example, the shortening of some of the courtroom speeches of Bigger's defense attorney: I cannot think that many readers would be offended with the curtailing of some of Max's talk); and in fact the account of the newsreel that involves Mary Dalton is contrived in the extreme and is happily replaced by a film about anonymous rich folks and Communists that at least is not bedeviled by the antic improbability of the original scene. There are losses and there are gains in the revising of *Native Son*, but both are relatively minor, and the truth is that the Library of America *Native Son* is not essentially different from the *Native Son* we have had for over fifty years.

On balance, I think that Arnold Rampersad has done well to restore the original version and that this is the edition we should read and teach, for one simple reason. The masturbation scene and certain others (like

the highly eroticized scene of Bigger putting Mary Dalton to bed) were deliberately designed by Wright to shock nearly everyone in his audience – his entire white readership (whose shock would take the form of “we knew this was what they were like all the time, but one of them had never told us before”) and the black middle-class that Wright knew would be offended and that he wanted to offend – to make it impossible for those bankers’ daughters to weep over *this* hero.

Black Boy, however, is another story, and here I think the editorial decision to tack what we can call either *American Hunger* or “The Horror and the Glory” onto *Black Boy* was wrong. It has recently been asserted that *Black Boy* is both a *Bildungsroman* and a *Künstlerroman*, and I think that this says something important about the necessary structure of the book. When he came to write *Black Boy*, Wright was at a considerable remove from the life he had known in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee – in Chicago and New York he was a writer shaping experience rather than only a victim buffeted by experience. That remove allowed him to understand his previous life as material for his art in a way that he could not have understood it while he was living it. From well after the fact, Wright tells a coherent story of his Southern experience; he can place it. But his experience in Chicago, as portrayed in *American Hunger* (primarily his involvement with Communism) is simply too close to the writer: it is right up against Wright’s face and so cannot be placed, understood or judged. *American Hunger* reads as *Black Boy* would have read if the latter had been written by the sixteen-year-old Richard Wright: uncertain, confused, incomprehensible, and difficult to follow. A *Bildungsroman* requires that the author be able to see how the protagonist’s character was formed; a *Künstlerroman* requires that the author be able to see how the artist came into being and that the developed artistry be demonstrated in the book being written. All of this Wright does in *Black Boy*, but little or none of it is possible or accomplished in *American Hunger*.

There is still another reason why the shape of *Black Boy* is preferable to the semi-shapelessness of *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*). (The very hanging of the parenthesized title on the end is a clear giveaway: the two are categorically dissimilar.) If one looks at *Black Boy* not only in the context of Wright’s career but also in the context of the African-American literary tradition, it emerges as nothing less than an archetypal account of a story repeated countless times in African-American experience and, when most successful, always with much the same shape to it. This is in the first instance the shape of the slave narrative which typically

– one might say generically – concludes with escape to the North. I don't mean to say that Wright was familiar with the body of published slave narratives. Indeed, I doubt that he could have been when he was writing *Black Boy*. But he knew that this is the way the story was told, and he had himself already worked a variation on it in "Big Boy Leaves Home" from *Uncle Tom's Children*.

Ralph Ellison made much the same response as Wright could have made when asked if he had been consciously influenced by the form of slave narratives in writing *Invisible Man*: he didn't need to read the slave narratives, Ellison said, he knew how the story went. The story itself demands this shape and will not adapt itself successfully to any other form (as we can see, for example, in the case of Frederick Douglass, whose *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* is both one of the earliest and the greatest of the slave narratives, but whose *My Bondage and My Freedom* and, even more, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* are merely diffuse, meandering, and relatively pointless books).

It does not seem to me to make any difference that it was the readers at the Book-of-the-Month Club who suggested that the book should stop, though Wright's own story went on, when he left the South. The structural point remains the same: both the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* conclude when "Richard" departs Memphis for Chicago. Moreover, I think there is evidence that Wright himself came to agree that this was the proper structure when he decided, before acceptance by the Book-of-the-Month Club, that *Black Boy* and not *American Hunger* was the right title for the book. *Black Boy* is precisely right for the Southern part of what was first submitted as *American Hunger*, but it does not properly describe the latter part of the manuscript. Furthermore, there is no contrary evidence that I am aware of to suggest that Wright was ever unhappy with the book as published.

Of course there is nothing wrong with having available the new text, but it should not replace what we have known until now as *Black Boy*. It must be said, however, that there is nothing new here, for the Chicago continuation of the story was published under the title *American Hunger* in 1977. The Library of America version essentially is no more than the yoking together of those two disparate parts. What I predict will happen, and in the nature of the case should happen, is that *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*) will become what the series title suggests, truly a "library" edition, to remain for consultation on library shelves, while we go on reading and teaching that greater achievement that is

Black Boy. For *Black Boy*, shorn of (*American Hunger*), is Wright's best book, at once the center and circumference of all that he did, and a book that is as central and as important as any in the whole of American literature.

James Olney

Looking Back

PHILADELPHIA FIRE. By John Edgar Wideman. Vintage Books. \$10.00.

THE STORIES OF JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN. By John Edgar Wideman. Pantheon. \$24.50.

THE HOMEWOOD BOOKS. By John Edgar Wideman. University of Pittsburgh Press. \$24.95.

John Edgar Wideman's literary career was until recently most notable for its ironic successes. Although between 1967 and 1990 he published seven novels and two short story collections, Wideman became best known for his one nonfiction book, *Brothers and Keepers* (1984), a powerful personal documentary about his younger brother Robby, convicted and imprisoned for his part in a robbery in which a man was killed. The book's success overshadowed a better work published the previous year, the PEN/Faulkner Award-winning novel *Sent for You Yesterday*, and did more to establish Wideman as a literary novelty – gifted writer from checkered family – than as a major American literary figure.

In 1990 Wideman again won the PEN/Faulkner Award – the only American writer to win it twice – for *Philadelphia Fire*. Based loosely on the calamitous 1985 bombing of the marginally Afrocentric MOVE group in West Philadelphia, *Fire* was Wideman's first book inspired largely by what might be called prevailing literary and political conditions. The novel is a bluesy and operatic *tour de force*, a fragmented postmodern docufiction that samples interwoven strands of African-American disgust and disappointment from the post-Civil Rights period to the middle of the Reagan era. Probing the fragile inner voice of a self-exiled writer who returns to America to try and understand the mo-

tives and implications of the bombing, the book summons the rhetorical firepower of the best African-American protest fiction (both Richard Wright and James Baldwin come to mind) while deploring the pathos of the MOVE fiasco as a larger symbol of the destruction of black political and cultural life. Recall that it was Wilson Goode's black democratic Philadelphia machine, savagely satirized in the novel, whose callously botched assault on MOVE made even federal indifference to black inner-city life seem temporarily benign.

Yet beneath *Fire's* contemporary outrage lay a clue to the more classical and enduring core of Wideman's work. The novel's emotional heart is the obsessive quest by the writer to discover what has become of a surviving child of the MOVE family, a fourteen-year-old boy last seen running from the flaming rowhouse. The frustrated search triggers the novelist's deeply melancholic fragmentation in the novel's second half, where his identity merges with that of another real-life writer, in some ways reminiscent of Wideman, who from a distance views the fire on television and meditates on the fate of his own troubled son. In one of the novel's most absorbing passages, the narrator considers the father-son relationship "an interchangeability that is also dependence: the loss of one is the loss of both," and wonders, "Will he ever write his son's story?" For both writers, exposure to larger historical traumas in African-American life compels personal apprehension of their immediate effects on family. Wideman seems to insist that in order to fulfill the role of cultural "witness" which African-American culture has traditionally ascribed to its authors, the writer must ultimately take himself as subject, looking inward at tribal and racial ties in order to discover what the novel calls "indications of time and the possibility of salvation, redemption, continuity."

This idea, murky as fictional subplot in *Philadelphia Fire*, is the obsessive pulse of Wideman's best work, as is now happily evident in two 1992 books in which his autobiographical urges are on full display. *The Stories of John Edgar Wideman* and *The Homewood Books* represent Wideman at the height of his writing powers and provide an important retrospective of his career. The former is comprised of two previously published story collections, *Fever* (1989) and *Damballah* (1981), as well as the previously unpublished story collection *All Stories Are True*. The latter includes *Damballah*, *Hiding Place* and *Sent for You Yesterday*. Cumulatively, these works represent Wideman's attempt to transform Homewood, Pittsburgh, the hardscrabble all-black neighborhood where Wideman was born in 1941 and where five generations of his family lived and grew, into an archetypal psychic map of African-American experi-

ence. The stories cover roughly one hundred and fifty years of family history, from the pre-Civil War arrival in Homewood of the ex-slave Sybela Owens, matriarch of the Wideman clan, to the 1991 musings of Wideman's grandmother about her imprisoned son, the same Robby of *Brothers and Keepers*. Like Faulkner, Wideman imagines the arc of ancestral events as a continuum, transforming the family chronicle's intrigues of memory, repetition and destiny into a potently mythical storytelling style best characterized by the writer himself in an interview as the "endless process of backward and forward and overlap and self-echoing and recapitulation that is a career, that is an evolution of a way of seeing, especially of a vision." Indeed memory is Wideman's artistic mode in the books, the source of a vision of time's restorative power filtered through an Africanist consciousness that insists, as the epigraph to *Sent for You Yesterday* has it, that "Past lives live in us, through us."

Damballah and *Sent for You Yesterday*, the best and central books in these two works, dramatize this vision through the overlapping narration of stories illuminating seminal figures from Wideman's family past. Most prominent and memorable among these are his grandfather John French, the "dangerous" profligate patriarch of the Wideman clan, and Wideman's mother Lizabeth. The two are characters in an episode described in both books. The child Lizabeth is rocking on the lap of her mother Freeda one day when the latter sees, through a window behind her husband, a man pull a gun in an alley. Instinctively Freeda crashes her hand though the window, scaring away John's would-be shooter. The story's repetition connotes a familial pattern – maternal women piloting troubled black men to safety – reiterated generations later in *Hiding Place*. There the real-life brother Robby of *Brothers and Keepers* appears as the fictitious Tommy. On the run after his crime, he takes refuge in the cloistered Bruston Hill home of Bess, a descendant of Sybela Owens who "wear(s) this house like Sybela Owens always wore her black cape." Their relationship bears the supernatural aspect of spectral lives. Like John French, Tommy is a hunted and haunted man, a faltering father who fears "the nigger in me" after learning as a young man how French squandered his family home. Guilty and pursued, he is "dead already, a ghost already up on Bruston Hill" alive now only to the question, "What was there inside him that needed to be free?" For Bess, Tommy is the living specter of the community's reprobate men and of her own son killed in World War II. Yet her prayers and conjures on his behalf cannot reverse either of their fortunes; she remains "an old woman in a dark house who knows when it's too late to help him, who knows he's long gone, who knows her arms are too weak to lift him and carry him

back where he belongs.”

The talismanic, self-sustaining power these stories acquire as family gossip and lore is the literary inheritance of Wideman's boyhood persona “Doot.” He figures most prominently in *Sent for You Yesterday* as the impish ear to family scandal and table talk, a carefree Stephen Dedalus distilling the many voices that comprise the grown man's lyrical reincarnation of the past. By the time one finishes reading the *Stories* and *Homewood Books*, Wideman's created ancestors have become recognizable “types” in the pantheon of African-American literature – the hellfire preacher, the rollicking blues musician, the martyred matriarch – yet each one reinvigorated, even reinvented by the intimate authorial knowledge of the site, smell, texture, the place that forges each soul. When this knowledge is absent, when Wideman leaves the emotionally supportive world of Homewood for the more estranged contemporary scene, the power of his writing and imagination falls off. The stories in *All Stories Are True* and *Fever* are at times marred by what seem commonplace observations on recent racial “news,” ranging from South Africa to urban poverty. Like the weaker sections of *Philadelphia Fire*, these stories strain to avoid the platitudes of political fiction, revealing Wideman's own suspicions of polemic. Wideman's other weakness, self-acknowledged in the preface to *The Homewood Books*, is a talent more impressive in the cumulative than the individual. Many of his family stories earn merit mainly in their relation to the intricate narrative web around them. His preference for concentric narrative structures also can bog down dramatic momentum, and his taste for dense improvisational prose, like an Ornette Coleman solo, can leave the reader straining to hold the syntactical thread. Yet these are more distractions than flaws in the work of a writer with a highly developed sense of how stories lived and written in this world are woven from the threads of the ancient and recent past. His fiction has given John Edgar Wideman a place not only in the recent renaissance in African-American literature but in the permanent American literary record.

Bill Mullen

Diaghilev's Dancers

DIAGHILEV'S BALLETS RUSSES. By Lynn Garafola. Oxford University Press. \$29.95.

The Ballets Russes mounted approximately ninety productions, from 1909, when it produced its first seasons of opera and ballet in Paris, until its demise in 1929. An extraordinary number of them are landmarks not only in the history of dance, but in that of twentieth-century theater, music, and art as well. The repertory contained original scores by Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy, Prokofiev, Poulenc, Satie, Milhaud, Richard Strauss, and de Falla. Artists like Matisse, Derain, Picasso, Juan Gris, de Chirico, Braque, Rouault, and Tchelitchev designed sets and costumes. And among its roster of dancers and choreographers were many of the greatest names in ballet history: Nijinsky, Karsavina, Pavlova, Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin, Spessivtzeva, Fokine, Lopokova, Kchessinska, Serge Lifar, Alexandra Danilova, George Balanchine, and Leonide Massine.

At the center of the company was the remote baronial figure of Serge Diaghilev, administering the affairs of the Ballets Russes through the group of secretaries, *regisseurs*, rehearsal pianists, and assistants that Stravinsky likened to a "homosexual Swiss Guard." Many aspects of Diaghilev's flamboyant personality are familiar, and like the streak of white hair, monocle, and astrakhan collar that appear so conspicuously in sketches of him by Picasso, Cocteau, and Larionov, were easily caricatured. His essential motivation, however, and the nature of his peculiar talent have remained elusive. When asked by King Alphonso XIII of Spain what exactly he did, the legendary impresario is reputed to have replied, "Your Majesty, I'm like you. I don't work, I do nothing, but I am indispensable."

Lincoln Kirstein, for one, has argued that what made Diaghilev indispensable was his "gift for heroic survival, his command of the fortuitous, his conquest of circumstances in adversity." Lynn Garafola's important and innovative study convincingly demonstrates that the impresario's "intuitive sense of the marketplace, his feeling for its liberating possibilities, and, above all, his grasp of how it might be manipulated to serve the traditional ends of high art," made the company's most significant achievements possible.

What limits did the market impose? To what extent were seemingly autonomous works of genius shaped by economic and cultural forces? Much of Garafola's book addresses these questions. She observes that

throughout the Ballets Russes' history, financial exigencies and the changing character of its audience had an impact on the company's artistic identity. These circumstances effected "shifts in repertory and in collaborative styles, changes in status of dancers and choreographers, the various strategies by which Diaghilev secured and maintained a position in the Western theatrical world." That art does not exist in a vacuum is obvious, but Garafola gives meaning to this generalization. She exhibits an unobtrusive mastery of a wide range of material with style and conviction.

Diaghilev, struggling to establish his company in the West, could not have mounted the initial seasons in Paris without substantial subsidies from the imperial government. When the Ballets Russes lost this support it was able to survive only because Diaghilev had succeeded in integrating the company into the operatic marketplace. He had found an audience in an emergent section of the haute bourgeoisie, which included many great merchant and banking families. For this audience Diaghilev paid a price. The success of Michael Fokine's oriental fantasies, their Baskt and Benois designs rooted in the symbolist aesthetic of the 1890s, while insuring the company's survival, helped to develop an audience which in turn narrowed, "by virtue of its taste, the field of artistic possibilities."

In the seasons that followed, compelled in part by a Paris audience that had become accustomed to being dazzled and astonished, the Ballets Russes underwent a series of transformations. By 1913 it emerged with a radically different artistic personality. With the advent of Vaslav Nijinsky as principal choreographer and the extraordinary choreographic departures presented in *L'Après-Midi D'Un Faune* and *Le Sacre Du Printemps*, the company was thrust into the ranks of the avant-garde. Of particular importance to its modernist aesthetic was the influence of the Futurist movement, whose ideas provided its "aesthetic scaffolding." Its impact on Diaghilev, Garafola emphasizes, "cannot be overestimated. The postwar trend toward caricature, parody and alogical structure that, along with popular entertainment material, first appears in the war years, stemmed directly from Futurist theory and practice."

The problems in keeping a performing arts company afloat without an institutional subsidy became especially acute in the years after the war, when traditional sources of patronage had vanished and the support of those friends of the ballet on whom Diaghilev had customarily depended was no longer sufficient. This was particularly the case after the disastrous failure in London of *The Sleeping Princess*, which placed the company's continuing survival in jeopardy.

Diaghilev's frantic efforts to secure the company's future eventually

resulted in an unlikely group of guarantors: the Société des Bains de Mer in Monte Carlo, where the Ballets Russes was in residence for part of each year; Lord Rothermere and other sponsors of the London seasons; and the Paris art world. Garafola argues that the disparate character of such patronage was at least partly responsible for the loss of aesthetic coherence and stability which at that point began to characterize the company. The principal works of the twenties exhibited an unlikely assortment of styles, the “retrospective classicism” of the 1921 revival of Petipa’s *The Sleeping Princess*, the “choreographic neoclassicism” of *Les Noces* and the “lifestyle modernism” of *Le Train Bleu*.

The one artistic constant in the years after the war was the progressive subordination of dance to design, which replaced music as the center of gravity in the new works. “The true dance in *Les Facheux*,” Jean Cocteau noted, “was the play of [Braque’s] beiges, chestnuts and grays.” Each successive wave of the avant-garde was represented in what Lincoln Kirstein has called “seasonal novelties” that “acted as a succession of one-man shows for post-Cubists, Constructivists, Neo-Romantics, Surrealists, and Metaphysicals, who often adorned summary choreography or trifling music.” This led composer and critic Constant Lambert to observe that although Diaghilev was able, in the company’s early seasons, to create a vogue for the Russian ballet, in the period after the armistice he “merely created a vogue for vogue.”

“Dancing,” Arlene Croce has observed, “leaves nothing else behind – no record, no text.” Choreography is only slightly less evanescent. Yet, although sixty years have passed since its final performance, interest in the Ballets Russes continues undiminished. The catalogue of memoirs, reminiscences, and theatrical chronicles is now quite a lengthy one. Unfortunately, the recollections of aging ballerinas which form the heart of these works tend to resonate with the rattling of teacups and the whispers of deprecatory remarks delivered in tremulous Russian accents. The response of many readers has often been one of exasperation. Croce has complained of the failure of writers about Diaghilev and his circle ever to take them seriously. All of this makes Garafola’s book an especially welcome contribution, one of the first sustained attempts to apply to dance the disciplines of social and cultural history, which by now form the prevailing orthodoxy in most other branches of historical inquiry. As she demonstrates: “To create a ballet company from scratch is never easy; to create a vital producing organization even harder. To do both in a commercial arena is almost a miracle. This near-miracle Diaghilev performed again and again for twenty years.”

Peter Dailey

Letters

To the Editor:

In his interview with Helen Frankenthaler (*PR* 2 1994), Hilton Kramer brought up the barrage of predictions, from all over the art world, of the coming demise of abstract painting. He recalled a panel discussion which had taken place one evening at the 8th Street Artists' Club on "New Figurative Painting:"

. . . the reason why that evening was so memorable was the statment that Alfred Barr made. . . . Alfred was, I think, enchanted with Larry Rivers's painting of Washington crossing the Delaware. . . . I don't think that Alfred quite understood the Rivers painting was a kind of camp play on the famous nineteenth-century American painting of the same subject.* That is, he certainly knew it was based on the earlier painting, but I don't think he quite understood the attitude toward the original that the Rivers painting displayed. Alfred said that evening that he thought that abstract painting was now coming to an end and that the next phase of American painting would be, like the Rivers painting, in the direction of a revival of history painting.

[**Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze]

Alfred Barr, then Director of MOMA, didn't understand that my painting "was a kind of camp . . ." because he and I saw each other a lot in those days, and in the months preceding MOMA's purchase of the work I proudly expressed many times to Alfred

that painting "G.W.C.T.D." was my "getting into the ring" with Tolstoy. I had just read *War and Peace*, and it had inspired me, in my own pompous and deadly serious way, to do a visual work of art based on a memorable event in American history, the way *War and Peace* was built on a memorable event in Russian history, the Napoleonic invasion. Long before I became aware of Leutze's painting, that iconographic image of American history – George Washington crossing the Delaware – was etched into my brain. I don't remember ever stopping to look at Leutze's painting at the Metropolitan.

For Hilton to think a recent escapee from the Bronx like me could have, by his late twenties, taken camp as part of his esthetic is a serious misreading of my artistic sophistication. "Camp" didn't make its way as an esthetic into art until long after I painted "G.W.C.T.D." I was also explicit about what I was doing in the painting in my autobiography, *What Did I Do?* I'm not sure why this rumor passing for fact bothers me. But while I can't concentrate on "the beautiful" in art, I do feel more comfortable with the truth in this matter.

Larry Rivers

Southampton, NY

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